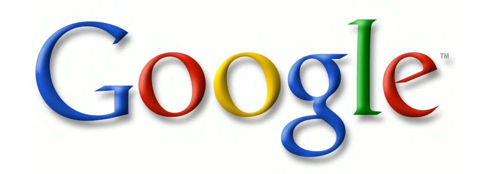
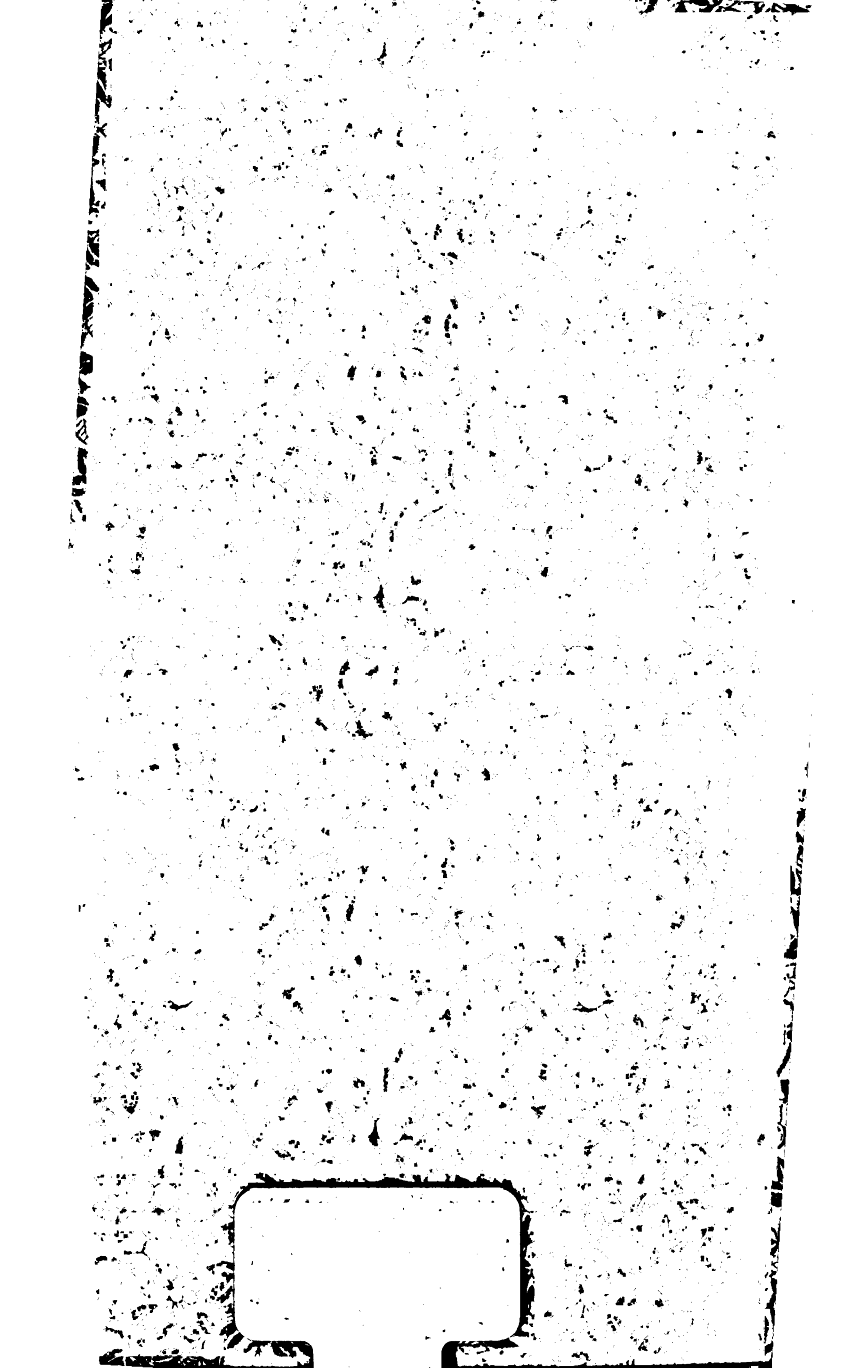
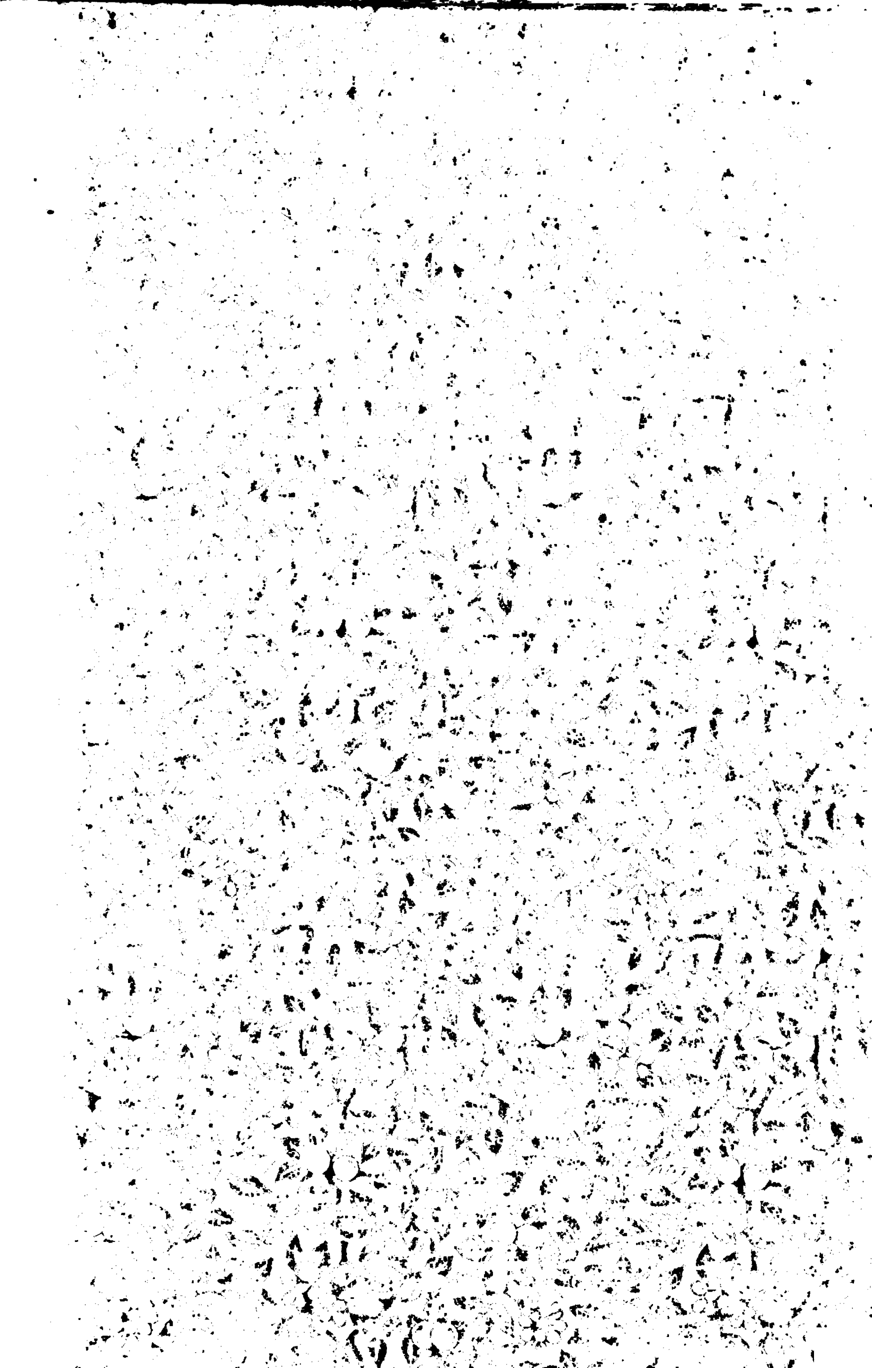
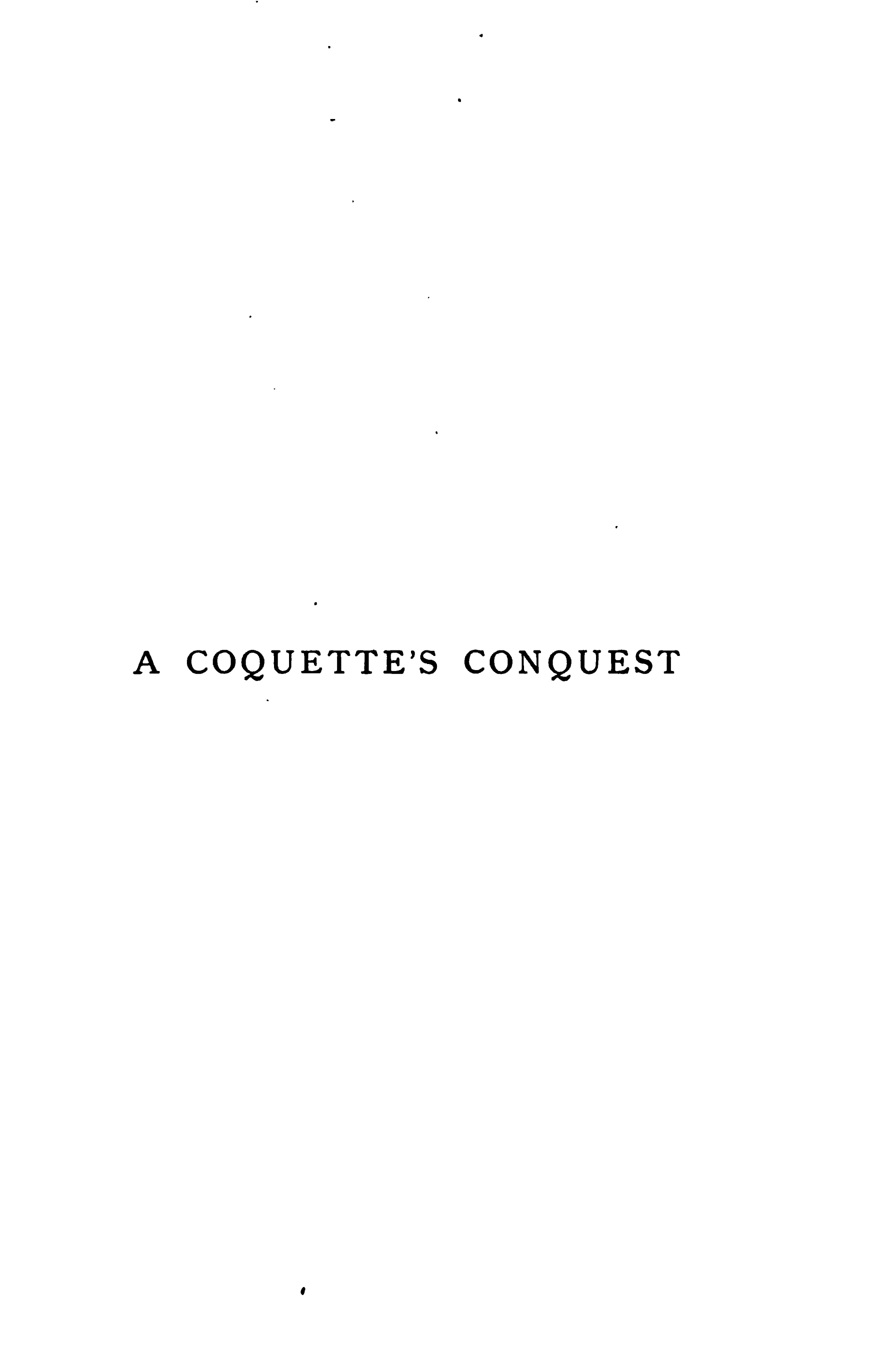

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A COQUETTE'S CONQUEST

A
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BY

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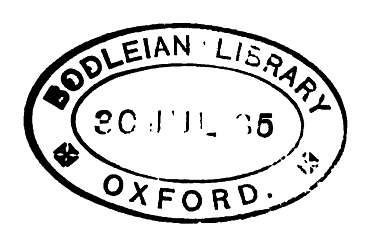
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IN THREE VOLUMES

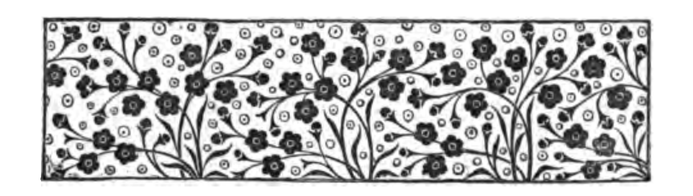
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A COQUETTE'S CONQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE ZACHŒUS.

Lucy's pleasure in the prospect of her visit to Burnside was reciprocated by her Uncle Zachœus. He would certainly have declined the honour of her visit if he had not been under heavy pecuniary obligation to her father. Mr. Lisle, not by any means disinterestedly, had advanced his brother a large sum at high interest and on good security to tide him over a commercial crisis. Zachœus could have had the loan advanced to him at less interest and on the same security by a stranger, but he feared that thereby his embarrassment might become known and so become bankruptcy. However, the com-

mercial crisis proved or seemed to be an extremely broad sandbar, not soon to be tided over, for Zachœus still struggled on for years in low water. The truth was Zachœus lacked one great element, in these days, of success—enterprise. He was as industrious and as unscrupulous as his successful competitors. He rose early and rested late, and ate the bitter bread of carefulness. His ideas of the limits of adulteration in goods and of sharp practice in bargains were, if anything, more liberal than those of the merchant and manufacturing princes of Lancashire and Yorkshire—the pride of England, the envy of the world. And he had, besides, an advantage which most of them lacked—he was devout, sincerely devout. He never missed church, nor stirred unnecessarily foot or finger on the Sabbath; and he denounced fervently as sinful all pleasures for which he cared nothing himself—that is, all joys but the joy of money-making.

Yet his very love of money defeated itself. Like many childless men he adopted

money as his child; and as a fond parent will sometimes make his only child delicate through sheer care for his health—through excess of coddling—so Zachœus' penuriousness kept him poor. He had not the heart to launch out into any extra expense for the change or for the improvement of his outworn or out-of-date machinery; and he paid his hands so miserably, and exacted from them so much, that only the refuse and rejected of all the mills of the district would work for him. Hence the work turned out by Zachœus' looms was notoriously the worst in the district.

Orders, therefore, did not pour in upon Zachœus, and he struggled on miserably with head half under water. He groaned under two apparently incompatible burdens; for he had all the worry of wealth and all the anxiety and privation of poverty. Not only was he harassed by the responsibilities of a large concern, and beset for such subscriptions as became a man at once religious and rich, but he was forced to keep up the appearances

of wealth, not merely for the sake of his commercial credit, but for the sake of peace at home. He had a wife—a woman so commonplace as to need no particular description. Such women are to be found in England by the thousand and the hundred thousand. She believed that she believed in the Bible, but her faith really was fixed in the very things which the Bible especially discredits—in appearances, riches, and rank. She worshipped propriety and social position. The British aristocracy were the high priests of her real religion, and its true avatar was royalty. No Bible instance of supreme condescension so awed her as the announcement in the *Court Circular*, 'The Queen walked to-day in the grounds'; and the most memorable incident of her life was her dancing once in a public ballroom in the same set of lancers with the Duke of Doncaster. For the rest, Mrs. Grundy was her conscience; propriety her moral law; and respectability her heaven. In a word, she seemed an ordinary British matron of the middle class,

such as may be met with by the score in every town and almost in every village in England. Of course, her having once danced in the same set of lancers with the Duke of Doncaster had its refining effect upon her mind and upon her manners, and distinguished her from her sisters of the same social rank as one star differs from another in glory; but as to us, who are afar off, the stars look much of a muchness, notwithstanding the confounding disparities between them in size and in function; so the distinction between Mrs. Zachœus Lisle and her acquaintances was lost upon those much removed from them in social status.

Now Mrs. Zachœus' love of society and consciousness of shining therein reconciled her to Lucy's visit. It is true that on the occasion of her last visit Lucy had turned up her pretty nose at the most brilliant Burnside society. She had even said 'there was no one in the place,' with an air that ought to have annihilated such of the inhabitants as had any sense of the fitness of things; never-

theless, as there were one or two men in the place to be captivated, and nearly a dozen girls to be made mad with jealousy, Lucy condescended to go out, as a sportsman condescends to shoot rabbits when no nobler game is to be found. Besides, even Burnside society was preferable to the society of her aunt and uncle by themselves. Therefore Lucy accepted the tame hospitality of the three houses which constituted, with that of her uncle, the society of Burnside. Of course she created there an extraordinary sensation, not merely by her beauty and brightness, but by her very arrogance; for in England generally, and more particularly in Yorkshire (where English characteristics are 'writ large'), the Bengalese proverb, 'He that gives blows is a master; he that gives none is a dog,' seems to be the guiding principle in social intercourse. Cool insolence secures civility; any civility warmer than the chilly conventional temperature provokes cool insolence. And yet, after all, our odious North American Indian bearing indicates the

very reverse of what we suppose it to indicate, *i.e.* a calm security of superiority. People who feel secure are not clad in steel.

But to return to Mrs. Zachœus. Lucy's brilliant social success reflected, her hostess considered, a glory upon the house. Therefore, though she rather disliked and dreaded Lucy, whose sharp speeches were not the less terrible for being sometimes unintelligible to her, she, on the whole, was pleased by the prospect of a visit which would be the excuse for such successful entertainments. Howbeit Zachœus disapproved at once of Lucy, of gaiety, and of expense.

Hence the mere letter announcing Lucy's visit became an apple of discord at Braithwaite—Uncle Zachœus' modest mansion.

'I pay Eustace six per cent already,' cried Zachœus wrathfully, as he tossed the letter over to his wife, meaning by this comment on its contents that the imposition upon him of Lucy was equivalent to the charge of a heavy additional percentage for the loan. But Martha, when she had read the letter,

observed only and reflectively, 'The Coulsons will be home next week.'

'No party giving,' said Zachœus very peremptorily. 'You know perfectly well that I don't approve of it—can't afford it.' Any one looking at the two disputants would have said decidedly that the husband would have his way. He was a tall, thin, saturnine-looking man, with sallow cheeks, heavy under jaw, and eyes dim, deadly, colourless, and cold as those of a snake. Whereas Martha was a weak and washed-out looking blonde, with next to no chin, and with a wondering and almost bewildered expression in her round pale blue eyes. But the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Martha had the inward strength of all the greatest inventors and reformers, which consists in their possession not of, but by, an idea. When an idea took possession of Martha it garrisoned her impregnably. Nothing had a chance of entry into her mind while it was so garrisoned. She would listen, or seem to listen, to everything you

had to say against it; she would even assent to it all with a flattering surrender to your superior powers of reasoning; yet, in the same breath with this assent she would repeat what she had said already, as though urging a perfectly new argument. In fact, you soon found you were fighting as one who beats the air, which yields to each blow only to close again as though it had never been cloven. When, therefore, Zachœus had said so decidedly, 'No party giving; you know perfectly well I don't approve of it, and can't afford it,' Martha, after a silence of some seconds, in which she appeared to be taking this peremptory prohibition to heart, said merely, 'I wonder how long she'll stay,' for on this point Eustace's first letter was silent. 'The Rhodes always give a harvest-home party in October.'

'Whether she stays or no, she shall not go to it,' Zachœus replied tartly; 'you may depend upon that. I am not so anxious to keep her as to coax her to stay by such silly, and worse than silly, fooleries.'

'We shall have to give a party in return, if they ask her; and they are quite sure to ask her,' Martha rejoined calmly. She was following out her own thoughts; yet she spoke with the air of having given good heed to Zachœus' words.

'Martha!' cried her husband sharply, as though waking her; and then he waited till she looked up inquiringly. 'Are you attending to me?' he asked angrily.

'Yes,' she replied in a tone of rather placid surprise.

'Then understand me once for all—I shall have no party giving or party going for that girl.'

'There's no use talking like that, Zachœus; if people ask us, we must ask them in return,' she replied, with a slight suggestion of annoyance at his unreasonableness in her tone.

'But if we don't, there's an end to it; and there must be an end to it,' he cried, rising impatiently.

'It isn't as if we were nobody,' went on

Martha quite composedly. 'People in our position——'

'Our position! Do you know what our position is?' Here he checked himself to add less irascibly, 'Martha, we're in no position to set an example of extravagance.'

'If you mean those men from Ribblebridge I wasn't thinking of having them. Mrs. Rhodes herself told me she would never have them again, because waitresses looked much neater and nicer, and didn't get tipsy; besides the expense—I've given Ellen warning,' for the mention of neat waitresses naturally suggested to her the slatternly maiden under notice.

'Then don't replace her. You've a houseful of servants eating their heads off; and, if you can't find work for them without giving parties, you'd better get rid of them. At any rate, we shall have no parties; you may make up your mind to that.'

'I don't think they quarrel much at all, except Ann; and cooks are cross always,' Martha replied, for squabbling was the only

meaning she could make out of the expression 'eating their heads off.' 'And she never grumbles about parties, for we get most of the things from Ribblebridge. And if she did, I'm not going to be my servant's servant, and mind everything my cook says.'

'But perhaps you'll mind what I say; and I tell you once for all we're not going to give parties for that girl, or for any one else.' Zachœus' tone expressed the exasperation he felt at her plodding and dogged persistence.

'Oh, nonsense, Zachœus!' she said, with some little impatience at his absurdity. 'We're not nobodies,' and having given thus his childishness such slight incidental rebuke as it merited, she passed on to serious subjects. 'I shall not have a mill-girl again—Ellen can't wash a cup, and is too saucy to learn. Besides, she's such a slattern, except on Sunday, when she so overdresses herself that she really looks hardly respectable. It's much better to pay a pound or two more in wages and get a neat and handy girl who

will know her work and know her place, and dress respectably, and do us credit when she opens the door or waits at table. It's cheaper, too, in the long run, for it's nothing but break, break, break with Ellen all day long.' Before, however, she had come to this apparent quotation from Lord Tennyson, Zachœus had flung from the room in despair.

But to get out of earshot of the equable, brook-like babble of his wife's tongue was one thing, to silence it was another, as Zachœus well knew. Like a tale to be continued in our next, she began at lunch exactly where she had left off after breakfast—by demonstrating how much more economical, as well as creditable, a trim and expert waitress would be. She even introduced, as the sole and costly alternative to this neat-handed Phyllis, the men from Ribblebridge—as though the party Zachœus had again and again forbidden was a settled thing!

In truth she no more regarded Zachœus' vexatious opposition than she would have regarded the passing petulance of a child

who objected to being dressed, or put to bed, or something equally necessary and inevitable; for was not the giving of a party under the circumstances, and for people in their position, an absolutely essential and inevitable duty? Wherefore she ignored Zachœus' opposition, not altogether unnaturally; for Zachœus, like the House of Lords, frittered away the value of his veto by opposing at first everything indiscriminately proposed by the Radical Chamber.

Thus at luncheon and at dinner, and during the evening, and in the long and lone night-watches, and before the morning watch, Martha, like remorse, tormented the miserable Zachœus. Next morning at breakfast she still stood doggedly to her guns, like Wellington at Waterloo, when an unexpected Blucher came up to decide the day in the shape of another letter from Eustace. This note, in asking Zachœus to take strict charge of Lucy for a year, enclosed curtly a cheque for her maintenance. Eustace did not think it necessary to make the least apology for

treating his brother as a lodging-house keeper. He did think it necessary to enclose the cheque, because he knew that, without it, Lucy would not be kept a year, or anything like a year, at her uncle's. Her uncle, on his side, was so far from being disposed to return the cheque indignantly, that his one thought was—how to keep the whole of it. If the place was made so unpleasant to the girl that she would return home soon and at all risks, then a large proportion of this very liberal sum must be refunded.

Thus Eustace's letter decided the day at once in Martha's favour. It is, however, mere and simple justice to Martha to say that she would have won her Waterloo without the help of this opportune letter, which only made her victory more speedy and decisive.

'That girl will be here to-day at 5.40,' Zachœus said when he had read his brother's letter, which, however, he did not this time toss over to Martha. 'You'd better see about her room. She's to stay a year with us.'

'A year!' exclaimed Martha, rather in

consternation than delight; for a whole year of Lucy's airs and snubs seemed a big price to pay even for all the distinction and dissipation she would bring to Braithwaite. Still, the girl must have enjoyed greatly her first visit to consent to a second of such length; and this flattering consideration helped to reconcile Martha to the prospect of her niece's trying company for an entire year.

'You need be in no hurry now about your parties,' observed Zachœus sardonically at sight of her consternation.

'She can't have thought the place so stupid after all,' Martha remarked complacently, for she was following, after her manner, her own train of thought.

'If she had not thought it stupid, she wouldn't have been sent here—Eustace is plainly displeased with her,' retorted Zachœus aggressively.

Here was a view of the place! A convict settlement! It was some little time before Martha could even take in this outrageous conception of brilliant Burnside.

'Do you mean that your brother sends her here as a punishment?' she asked at length indignantly.

But Zachœus, having now a reason for wishing to make the place pleasant to Lucy, replied diplomatically, 'I think Eustace wishes her to have the advantage of your training and control, as she has no mother.'

'She wants forming, certainly,' Martha, gratified exceedingly, replied with great stateliness, unconsciously drawing herself up at the compliment.

We can just picture Lucy's face at such a suggestion—that she needed forming, and forming by Aunt Martha!

The success of his compliment, however, rather irritated than gratified the grim Zachœus; not merely because, as a husband, he could not endure the sight of his wife's exultation, but also because this exultation was likely to break out in a burst of parties.

'It's rather steadying that she wants,' he said severely. 'She's too much given to gaiety.' Here was the Botany Bay view of

Burnside presented again to Martha, with the agreeable addition of herself as chief turnkey.

'I shall not make a convent of the house for her, or for any one else, if that's what you mean,' she replied in all the greater dudgeon from her late exultation.

'I hardly think Eustace expected that you would,' retorted Zachœus with satirical bitterness.

'And I'm not going to be a stepmother to the girl either.'

At this unfortunate speech Zachœus chuckled sardonically. 'I didn't know he had asked you,' he said with a kind of snort which was extremely irritating.

'She shall share in all the gaiety of the place,' Martha rejoined with unusual warmth, and as though throwing open the doors of an *Arabian Nights'* palace to her visitor. 'And I shall give the parties for her I intended.'

'Give them, and have done with them, then. Anything is better than droning about them, morning, noon, and night, in this way.'



CHAPTER II.

'POOR YOUNG MAN!'

BOTH subjects of the domestic dispute we ventured to describe at length in the last chapter—that of the party and that of a more expert and expensive waitress than the slatternly Ellen—owe their prominence in our story to their bearing upon the fortunes of Lucy. They had both, as we shall see, a very important bearing upon the fortunes—which we propose now to follow for a few chapters—of this wayward young person.

Next morning at breakfast Martha droned away still unwearied upon the manifold shortcomings of mill-hands as servants, and the manifold advantages of a duly-trained domestic, who had learned to know at once her place and her work in some aristocratic

household. She instanced, not quite happily, perhaps, a former servant—a perfect treasure—who had lived so long in titled families that she was continually addressing her (Martha) as 'My lady.' Now, the mere mention of this lost treasure had upon Zachœus the effect that the flourishing of a red flag in its face has upon a bull. He had not the least doubt, and he had no reason for any, that this young *élève* of the aristocracy had stolen at various times in various sums about £25. No one else could possibly have taken £11 of this amount, and it was only natural to assume that the £14, which had previously disappeared by a sovereign or so at a time, had gone into the same pocket. Nevertheless, Martha, reasoning altogether upon high *a priori* grounds, would never believe that so respectable and respectful a handmaiden with such an aristocratic pedigree of place to boast of could have descended to theft. She had, however, frightened by the fury of Zachœus at the loss of such a sum, to dismiss the damsel at once

without notice or a month's wages at the risk of being sued therefor—a risk which Zachœus laughed justly to scorn, for the maiden was too discreet to provoke exposure in a court of law. Howbeit, Martha interpreted this discretion of hers as an aristocratic shrinking from the gross vulgarity of a squabble about wages in a county court.

Martha's reference to this lost treasure, at a moment when she was set upon gaining Zachœus' consent to engaging a better servant at higher wages than Ellen, was a by no means singular instance of her singular want of tact.

'The girl was a robber, and ought to be picking oakum at this moment,' Zachœus cried wrathfully.

'She came to me from Sir George Drury's, and she had been two years before that in the service of Lord Sedberg!' Martha said, appealing to Lucy, to whom this was an old story, and who, besides, was not in a happy temper.

'From a baron to a baronet, and from a

baronet to robbery! It's always the way,' Lucy said, shaking her little head solemnly. 'Once one begins to go wrong it's so hard to stop.'

Martha would probably not have understood Lucy's satire, if she had given her whole mind to mastering it; but, as usual, she hardly heeded what was said to her in her absorption with her own thoughts. 'She was lady's-maid to Lady Violet Everdale,' she continued, placidly and complacently, 'and went all over Switzerland with her, and could speak the language.'

'Swiss?' pertly interjected Lucy.

'And I never knew any one who could lay a table, or wait at table, like her.' Thus the indiscreet Martha ambled on till she drove Zachœus to frenzy and to his mill. Then she turned to say querulously to Lucy: 'Your uncle never will listen to anything I say.'

'Oh, I think he took it all in,' Lucy replied composedly. 'And he's probably gone to find a mill-hand for you in place of Ellen.'

'A mill-hand!' exclaimed Martha.

'Didn't you wish him to get you one?' Lucy asked innocently. 'I thought you must have been aiming at that.'

'Then you couldn't have heard a word I said,' Martha replied in an aggrieved tone.

'Indeed, though, I did. You asked uncle to get you a servant like Seymour, who, he thinks, robbed him of £25.'

'She never did anything of the kind,' Martha retorted with unusual asperity.

'But, if uncle thinks she did, what was the good of mentioning her, unless you wanted him to get you a mill-girl in Ellen's place?' Lucy asked with a petulant impatience of such crass and unfeminine *gaucherie*. But Martha proceeded, in reply, to prove that Seymour never had, or could have, stolen the money, under the impression that she was thereby completely demolishing Lucy's argument. Wherefore Lucy also vanished in disgust, only, however, presently to re-appear, and even to reopen the subject.

'We had a servant who had been in very

high families, and she certainly never stole anything. She came to us from the Mowbrays of Mountmartyr with a very good character, which she well deserved.'

'Is she with you still?'

'No; she's helping her mother at home at present. But she would be glad to go into service again, I know.'

'Was she a waitress?'

'Not with us; but she had been a waitress in some other family. She could do anything and everything, and was the most refined-looking girl of her class I have ever seen. I wish she would come to you,' as though that was the sole question. This way of putting it had its intended effect upon Martha, who, however, was bound, as a mere matter of dignity, to ask:

'Do you think she would suit us?'

'As to wages you mean?' replied Lucy, with superb impertinence.

'I meant, suit us as a servant,' rejoined Martha, somewhat discomfited.

'Oh!' Lucy retorted drily, in a tone which

suggested that Martha had said something really too absurd.

'She might be too grand for us, you know,' Martha said, nettled into sarcasm. Now a sarcasm of this kind is a weapon which can be, not merely turned aside, but turned back upon the speaker by ingenuously taking him at his word; and therefore Lucy replied encouragingly: 'Oh, I don't think so. It's only common servants, like vulgar people, who are superfine.'

By keeping to this tone calmly and steadily Lucy not merely defeated Martha, but secured her object; for she gave her aunt an idea of this very superior handmaiden, which she could not in any other way have conveyed so effectively to that good lady. After a little more indirect commendation of this kind Martha was convinced that no other servant would suit her so well, and doubted only if such a place would suit such a superb young person.

But why should Lucy show such a sudden and unprecedented interest in her aunt's

domestic concerns? Well, partly in her own interests, and partly in those of this highly-recommended handmaiden, to whom she owed some reparation. Jessie had been summarily dismissed by Mr. Lisle for attending Lucy to some play, opera, or concert, in Leeds, to which the young lady would go clandestinely, in spite of all Mary's remonstrances. This at least was the ostensible reason for Jessie's dismissal; but its real ground was Mr. Lisle's distrust of a girl, who had gradually become the exclusive and devoted servant of his thoroughly distrusted daughter. In truth, the dismissal of Jessie—a deft and discreet damsel, with all the aptitude for an intrigue of a stage *soubrette*—was to Lucy a heavy blow, which was not softened by the engagement, as her successor, of the officious and odious Alice.

Therefore, after Lucy had left the room in disgust with her aunt's fatuity, it occurred to her suddenly that here was at once a *solatium* for Jessie and a solace in exile to herself offered in this situation. Hence she

returned to recommend the maiden so skilfully and so highly—not too highly either—Jessie was the most versatile and presentable of handmaidens — refined-looking and extremely pretty; quick to learn and quick to execute new tasks. She was over-clever, it is true, but one cannot find perfection even in a servant, where every mistress seems to expect it.

'My dear,' observed Mrs. Alaric Watts to a lady, who had enlarged to her on her cook's shortcomings, 'one has no right to expect all the virtues under heaven for thirty pounds a year.'

'But I give *guineas*,' retorted her wooden friend triumphantly.

Now Martha, not being as liberal as Mrs. Watts' wooden friend, could hardly complain if she came thirty shillings' worth, or more than thirty shillings' worth, short of all the virtues under heaven in a handmaiden. That she should have got Jessie at all for the highest wages Zachœus could be worried into offering was a surprise to any one who did not

know that Lucy generously supplemented the stipend out of her own pocket, for Martha did get her through Lucy, to whom Jessie was sincerely attached. Thus it came about that two of the prettiest girls in Yorkshire appeared almost simultaneously in Burnside Parish Church to the distraction of the entire congregation—the men with admiration, the women with jealousy—the upper ten thousand canvassing Lucy, the lower dim, common populations canvassing Jessie; for the church on the occasion happened to be crowded to its utmost capacity of three hundred and fifty souls.

But why was the church on this occasion—a fortnight after Lucy's arrival in Burnside—crowded to excess? As nothing of importance to our story happened at Burnside within this fortnight, we shall hurry on with the breathlessness of Martha herself to disclose the event which occasioned this religious revival in the village. It was nothing less than the arrival at Burnside Abbey of the Lord of the Manor, and of half the

countryside, Sir Edward Dromore, an eccentric gentleman of immense wealth, who led alternately the life of a Sybarite and of an Anchorite. Such alternations of abstinence with dissipation are very common indeed among working-men, and especially among the most skilful of skilled artizans; but they are not thought romantic in men of this class. In a man, however, of Sir Edward's birth, wealth, and position, they were considered Byronically romantic. Exaggerated accounts of his wild outbreaks in London and Paris, and of his sudden solitary and ascetic retirement in the very heat and height of such an outburst to 'a lodge in some vast wilderness,' had, of course, reached and astonished Burnside.

But, though Burnside itself, to every one except its inhabitants, seemed an eligible wilderness of retreat, Sir Edward had never before visited the place, having hitherto sought solitude somewhere abroad. Great, therefore, was the sensation caused by the announcement that Sir Edward had come

into residence in the Abbey; and great the crowd and the expectation of the crowd in church on the succeeding Sunday.

On that Sunday, however, as we have said, Lucy and Jessie shared the attention of the congregation between them, which they would certainly not have done if Sir Edward had sat in state in the patron's pew. But he did not attend church. Burnside folk were not prepared for pravity of this flagrant sort. That Sir Edward should indulge in debaucheries of all kinds, and all of the worst kind (as they believed), was natural and excusable in a young man engaged in sowing his wild oats; but that he should omit to set a good example by going on Sunday to church was monstrous. A good deal of this righteous wrath, it is true, was due to disappointment at their having themselves gone to church for nothing; but a good deal was due also to the English worship of decency before all things. Nothing, perhaps, is more characteristically English than the sacred preservation and

veneration of the mere rind of some goodly apple rotten at the heart, or which has been wholly eaten out long since by slugs or wasps. Wherever you look, in Church or State, in Law, or in the British Constitution, you see a rosy row of the rinds of these rotten or hollow apples in sacred preservation. There may be a good deal of cant in the worship of other countries, but in England cant its very self is an object of worship.

But to return to the scandalised people of Burnside—to those of them at least with whom our story has to do. It is mere justice to Martha to say that she thought this thing incredible. It was not to be believed that a man of Sir Edward's birth, wealth, and position, should shirk church to the demoralisation of the whole countryside. Either he was ill, or he had a private chaplain, or he would have Mr. Dormer, the Vicar of Burnside, up in the evening to read prayers in the great hall. That he should go to the afternoon service was out of the question, because that was a plebeian service.

'But, if he is what you said last night he was, I should think church was the last place for him,' Lucy said impatiently. She was irritated by her own disappointment, for she had dressed herself with unusual care and effect in the hope of attracting the baronet's admiration. Martha was greatly scandalised by this profane speech.

'Church is a place for every one,' she said severely, 'and especially for those who should set an example.'

'An example of hypocrisy? I didn't know you needed it here,' Lucy retorted, with a special application of the speech in her own mind to her uncle. Indeed her prejudice against religion and its professors was due as much to her knowledge of her uncle as to her home experience. But Martha heeded her not. She had stopped every now and then to look back since they had left the church door, and she had now caught sight of what she had been on the look-out for.

'There he is!' she exclaimed. Lucy, of course imagining her to mean Sir Edward,

was careful not to look round. As, however, Zachœus had stopped, she also had to come to a stand. 'I must ask him,' continued Martha.

'This is no subject for the Sabbath,' Zachœus said; nevertheless he waited, which he would not have done if he also had not been curious about this great and grave matter. Then Lucy, knowing now it could not have been Sir Edward, suffered herself also to look round, to find, as she suspected, that Mr. Dormer, the vicar, was the person Martha was awaiting in breathless suspense.

Mr. Dormer was naturally and professionally under the impression that church-going and communicating *per se* were an end, and not a mere means to an end—as though one should think eating and drinking work, and not a mere means to strengthen one for work. A man like Zachœus, who never missed church or communion, was a good man; though he combined in himself the characteristics most highly held in hate in the Gospels—those of the hard, griping, grinding, rich man, and those of the formal, narrow,

intolerant, and self-righteous Pharisee. On the other hand, a good Samaritan, who never attended church or chapel, had a hopeless shake of the head from the happy folk who looked at him across the great gulf fixed between them. Therefore, Mr. Dormer would also have considered church-going, however formal and hollow, as an atonement for Sir Edward's sporadic sowing of wild oats.

Martha could hardly wait to say, 'How do you do?' before she burst out with 'Where's Sir Edward Dromore, Mr. Dormer?' as though the vicar must have hidden him away in the vestry; 'we all expected him to have been at church.'

'Ah!' replied the vicar, with a sigh like a groan, and a despairing shake of the head. 'Where is he? Fishing? or practising with a revolver?' Martha gasped, and Zachœus, sincerely shocked, held up his hands.

'Dear!' at last exclaimed Martha, as though her oldest friend had deceived her cruelly.

'I had hoped so much from his coming

amongst us, not for the place only, but for himself. I thought he must realise his responsibilities here and be sobered by the sense of them, and settle down steadily and finally; but——' Here the vicar paused, filling up the aposiopesis only by an eloquent shake of the head.

'Have you seen him?' asked Zachœus.

'He will see no one. I called, of course, on Friday, but I was not even allowed inside the door. The man—I believe he's the only servant in the house—said, "I was to send in my business." I insisted on his taking in my card, and he brought it back to me riddled with bullet-holes! "Sir Edward's compliments," he said; "and that was done at five yards." As much as to say he would serve me in that way if I came within that distance of him! He ought to be shut up in an asylum,' the vicar cried excitedly, at recollection of this ferocious reception.

Martha looked her mute amazement at Zachœus with something of Macbeth's horror in her face—

> 'Can such things be,
> And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
> Without our special wonder?'

Zachœus only shook his head as though to say, 'Just what I expected!' for as he expected always the worst from all his fellow-creatures, no iniquity took him by surprise. Lucy, seeing the three so absorbed, allowed herself to smile; for to her there was something irresistibly ludicrous in the egotistical little vicar's horror at the sacrilegious insult to his consecrated self. But then Lucy had little religious reverence in her composition. Besides, Mr. Dormer, in his self-absorption, had never addressed her, or even glanced at her—a slight which Lucy was the last person to forgive.

The vicar, encouraged by the reflected horror in the faces of his audience, continued to unfold his harrowing tale:

'And yesterday, when I was about to cross the park by the footpath to Berrybrow, the gatekeeper, old Hick, stopped me at the gate, and said he had strict orders to allow

no one into the park that day, because Sir Edward was in the grounds fishing!'

'It's a public footpath,' Zachœus cried, with a sudden setting of his heavy under jaw. He used the path constantly, and was a dour and dogged stickler for the least of his rights.

'I'm afraid not,' replied the vicar; 'I hurried off at once to consult a lawyer about it, but he said I hadn't a leg to stand on. It's a private path which the public are allowed to use only on sufferance.'

'Ay, Holmes will tell you so, for he's Dromore's solicitor, or his agent's,' Zachœus answered, in the keenness of his interest, forgetting the Sabbath.

'No; I thought of that, and went instead to Dobson—that radical fellow, who would be only too glad of any case against the estate which was likely to hold water for a moment.'

'It's my impression that it's a public footpath,' reiterated Zachœus; and he seemed to imagine that his impression ought to be held to outweigh a Lord Chancellor's opinion.

Zachœus having now got a grievance of his own was little likely to have any sympathy, or attention even, to spare to those of the vicar; wherefore Mr. Dormer, losing all interest in the conversation, raised his hat and departed.

On his departure Martha exclaimed, 'What a pity!'

'He'll have to reopen it, whether he likes it or not,' Zachœus said wrathfully, imagining her to refer to the footpath.

'But that poor young man!' Martha continued, tearfully almost.

'What poor young man?' asked Zachœus testily.

'Sir Edward—he has certainly lost his reason.'

'Perhaps he knows Mr. Dormer?' suggested Lucy as a much more probable explanation. Martha, however, was little likely to see the relevance of this remark.

'Knows him? of course he knows him. He gave him the living.'

'Then it was in self-defence,' replied Lucy;

as though, if the vicar had been shot, no jury could have brought in against Sir Edward any other verdict than that of justifiable homicide. 'That little man is such a bore, and such a pushing and thick-skinned bore, it was the only way to keep him off.' (*Injuria spretæ formæ!*)

Then Zachœus remembered that it was the Sabbath. 'Lucy,' he said sharply; 'respect the day, if you have no respect for our clergyman, or for us.'

For the rest of the walk, and even of the day, Martha wondered 'who the poor young man would shoot' (it was 'the poor young man' who was to be pitied in the event of such a catastrophe). What would then be done to him? Would he be sent to Broadmoor, or would his friends be allowed to take him in charge? Above all, would he be permitted to marry? This last problem had an extraordinary fascination for Martha. Was there any law against lunatics—criminal lunatics—marrying? Plainly to her mind the one great purpose which the member of so old

and great a house was meant to serve was the same as that which the queen-bee was meant to serve—the continuation of the race; that the race so continued should be idiotic or insane was a matter of relatively little importance. The aristocratic

'Tenth transmitter of a foolish face'

did the human race such a service in transmitting it, that its silliness or insanity might well be left out of the account in our acknowledgment of so blessed a boon.





CHAPTER III.

GIANT DESPAIR.

Even if Lucy's life had been as full as it had been empty of local interest, the sudden appearance of this eccentric comet on the little Burnside horizon would have been most welcome to her. As it was, in the dull monotony of her life everything she heard of the Burnside Timon had an interest amounting almost to fascination for her. And she heard of nothing else for some time. The sudden visit of a man of such extraordinary importance and eccentricity to the sleepy little neighbourhood was as the dropping of a great stone into a narrow, shallow, and stagnant pool—there was a huge splash, a violent upheaval and agitation, and then a succession of wave upon wave in ever wide-

ning circles. These successive waves symbolise well the successive reports of the baronet's manners, habits, mode of life, and conduct, which confounded Burnside. Men as they met forgot to ask each other how they were, or tell each other what kind of day it was; they only and breathlessly asked and told some new thing about Sir Edward. Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about these extraordinary stories was their origin; for Sir Edward lived with a single servant of his own sex in such absolute seclusion that no visitor, steward, gamekeeper, or tradesman was allowed inside the door. How did it then become known that the recluse baronet had exhumed with his own hands and his servant's help at night those of his ancestors who were buried in the churchyard of the old abbey; had set each skeleton, skilfully wired, under its own portrait in the picture gallery in the attitude appropriate to the profession adorned in life by each; and that he held then on each a kind of Egyptian trial of the dead, and practised with his revolver at the eye-sockets

of the condemned? On what authentic basis could this grisly story rest if, as was admitted, none was suffered to enter the house? That the graves in the old abbey looked as though they had been disturbed, and that pistol practice went on in the Abbey House at dead of night were ascertainable facts; but how could the rest of the weird story have been ascertained? Nevertheless it was accepted implicitly in all its particulars by others than old women of either sex. It had, however, this in its favour—that no one in Burnside had imagination enough to invent it, if we except Lucy, who certainly had not set it going.

Then stories of all kinds, and all of the most gruesome kind, were afloat to account for the soul-piercing wailings which tormented the night in the neighbourhood of the abbey—though common-sense folk accounted for them as the howlings of some of the host of dogs which Sir Edward had certainly imported into the house. Common-sense folk again pronounced the mysterious servant to be the

baronet's keeper; while others—the great majority—believed a story which had reached Burnside from London, and had, we believe, even appeared, under initials, in a society journal. According to this account, the servant was one of the baronet's boon companions with whom he had had a fierce quarrel (of course about a woman), and to whom he had at once sent a challenge. As, however, it was then discovered that neither had ever handled sword or pistol in his life, it was arranged—to save the duel from ridicule—that before crossing to Belgium they should have a month's pistol practice of the same precise number of hours daily and together—to insure fair play. During this month of training each on alternate days acted as servant, so far as cooking, etc., were concerned; but neither ever opened his lips to address the other.

Howbeit the little vicar maintained with much warmth that the man who opened the door for him only to slam it again in his face was an unmistakable flunkey; but then he

was so convinced, as he explained, because no one but a flunkey would have thus insulted him. Any way, he was quite certain it was not Sir Edward, because, though he had never seen him, he had heard from him, and the letter was anything but a slam or slap in the face—it was a most courteous letter. In truth, the letter was a simple and formal offer of the living to Mr. Dormer, in which there was hardly more room for courtesy or discourtesy than there would have been in an invitation to dinner.

Stories, of which the above are a sample, had a natural fascination for a girl of Lucy's age and temperament. She had an extraordinary longing for a glimpse of the Byronic baronet, and she would now often take the walk across the park to Berrybrow, for the mere pleasure of passing near the abbey. Who knows but she might some day hear or see one of these strange things? She would not for the world have met the baronet alone in the park, because she had a horror that was almost morbid of mad people; and

she was not at all sure that the theory of insanity—even though her aunt held it—was not the most probable explanation of Sir Edward's eccentricities. But she knew there was not the least chance of her meeting the baronet in the park, for the simple reason that, when he took it into his head to walk there, its gates were shut against the public. Therefore Lucy had nothing to deter her from taking her favourite walk, which was certainly the most beautiful in all the beautiful neighbourhood.

But one day she was trapped. The fitful baronet, taking it into his head one afternoon to go afishing, gave sudden orders for the shutting of the park gates, whereby Lucy, who was in the park, was caught as in a net. Of this, however, she had not the least suspicion as she idled dreamily the golden afternoon away—now resting to read a book of Rowan's, and now sauntering along beneath the shadow of the great trees by the river.

Suddenly, as from out of the very bowels of the earth, there sprang up at her feet three

monstrous dogs; while at the very same moment she felt a horrid wrench at her hair behind.

In the clutch of the madman!

She could not scream; she dare not turn her head, but stood as though, having turned it, she had seen Medusa—a stony horror in her fixed eyes, white and drawn face, and parted lips, in which the breath seemed frozen. But though turned to marble outwardly, within the mind, like a stricken hart, was taking the mad, wide bounds of terror. Every form of horrible death she had ever heard or read of flashed with the swiftness and vividness of lightning before her in a single second of time.

'Confound it! Halloa! By Jove!' cried a voice, which, however, was not the voice of him who had hold of her hair, for it came from some one at a little distance. 'The keeper,' thought Lucy, with a sense of the most blessed relief. And indeed at the same moment the tug at her hair ceased, and she ventured to look back fearfully. The mad-

man was gone, and his keeper was hurrying towards her. He was just the man for the post—a man plainly of immense strength of muscle and of mind. He was over six feet high and was made in proportion; while firmness and fearlessness were written in every line of his close-shaven, massive, square-cut face, and looked out at you through his wide-apart, penetrating, unflinching gray eyes. A single glance at him reassured Lucy instantaneously and absolutely.

'I really beg your pardon,' he said, raising his hat as he approached her. 'You're not hurt, I hope?'

'No, thank you,' Lucy replied, looking round as she spoke for her assailant.

'Pray, pray, don't turn your head,' cried the keeper in a voice of alarm which renewed her terror. 'If you will keep quite still I shall free you in a moment.' And he proceeded to disengage one of the hooks of his fishing line from her back hair.

'Oh!' cried Lucy as the absurd truth of the matter dawned on her. Then she shook

with laughter in the greatness of her relief from her terror and in the overpowering sense of its ludicrousness.

'You are laughing at my stupidity,' said piscator, who, having discovered that Lucy was extremely pretty, lingered out this surgical operation of extracting the hook as long as he decently could. Indeed, being a great admirer of luxuriant hair in maidens, he contrived intentionally to loosen Lucy's till it flowed in a wide, shining, rippling flood down her back and below her waist. He had hardly begun his task of 'linked sweetness long drawn out' before Lucy had come completely to herself. This, then, was the mysterious Sir Edward—one of the finest-looking men she had ever seen. In casting his line one of the hooks had caught in her hair, and the sudden and strong chuck had been taken by her for the clutch of the lunatic. But the lunatic was so little of a lunatic that at this moment, as Lucy could feel, he was flirting in the most audacious manner with her back hair; for it did not need Lucy's nice

sense of touch and quick sense of coquetry to discover that the great clumsy hands behind her were busy in their bungling way about letting down her hair. Wherefore, when he said, 'You are laughing at my stupidity,' Lucy, all herself—all coquetry, that is—promptly replied:

'No; at my own.'

'At your own?'

'I was so horribly frightened, I couldn't think who had clutched me by the hair.'

'You thought Giant Blunderbore had seized you?'

'Giant Despair, for trespassing in his grounds,' she replied readily and saucily, for really this fumbling attempt to let loose her hair was too undisguised and audacious. 'Can't you disentangle the hook?'

'I am afraid,' he answered with surgical gravity, 'that I shall have to cut a little of the hair away with it—only one little lock,' he added in a businesslike tone; and then quoted, as though to himself—

'"With hairy springes we the birds betray;
Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey;
Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,
And beauty draws us with a single hair."

You will permit me to cut a very little of it off?' Lucy was now really offended, for she had at once sufficient self-respect to resent such freedom, and sufficient sense to know that not to resent it would be a blunder in coquetry even. Yet his tone was so businesslike that she could not, without an appearance of prudery, show that she understood its real meaning. Wherefore she said coldly, 'If you will be so good as to cut the hook off, I can get it taken out at home.'

'There,' he said, 'I have got it out, and brought all your hair down in the attempt. I'm quite ashamed of my clumsiness. My "little hands were never made to"—do a lady's hair.'

Lucy, though she could well forgive him for showering down her wealth of glorious hair, of which she was naturally vain, did

not make the expected pleasant response to his pleasantry.

'Thank you,' she replied formally; 'it doesn't matter. I can put it up again in a moment.' Now a pretty girl, with a fine figure, looks her best in this attitude of putting up her hair; and Lucy looked nothing less than lovely as she stood facing him, her arms raised, her lissom, yet well-developed figure shown to perfection, her graceful neck bent forward, and her fawn-like eyes glancing at him upwards, as little children look up at you —bringing home to you thereby engagingly their dependence and innocence.

He, on the other hand, looked to her the manliest man she had ever seen, not merely in the matter of thews and sinews, but in the stern strength of character expressed in his face. He looked a hero of the Rochester type—the type that girls, and young girls especially, worship. Indeed, women in general worship strength of any kind, even brute strength of muscle and of passion, especially if the reins over it—ay, or even

the whip—are in the iron hands of a stubborn will.

> 'And women—things that live and move,
> Mined by the fever of the soul—
> They seek to find in those they love
> Stern strength and promise of control.
>
> 'They ask not kindness, gentle ways,
> These they themselves have tried and known;
> They ask a soul that never sways
> With the blind gusts that shake their own.'

There was but one fault for Lucy to find in the expression of the handsome masterful face which looked down into hers with such pronounced admiration—its over-boldness. Lucy liked boldness in reason—that is to say, as a prince likes it in a prime minister—so long as it does not encroach on his own prerogative. But this *veni, vidi, vici* boldness of a perfect stranger offended her vanity more than his admiration flattered it. She was certainly not going to allow even a Byronic baronet to treat her as a barmaid.

'In my nervous eagerness to repair one piece of clumsiness, I have committed another

less pardonable, I'm afraid,' he said apologetically, on perceiving that he had gone a little too far. Nervous!

'Oh, it's easily made right,' Lucy replied with a chill composure which was most discouraging.

'Your hair; yes. But my offence? I wish I could set that right as easily, and—and as gracefully,' he said hesitatively; and then added hastily and dolefully, 'There! I've put my foot into it again. There was a fellow up yesterday to mend a broken pane in the roof of the conservatory, and in trying to mend one he put his great clumsy hoof through three!'

'Through nervousness?' Lucy asked, in a manner whose absolute gravity was much more effective than archness would have been. Having brought our friend down to his proper level, she was not at all disinclined for a fencing bout of coquetry.

'I daresay,' he answered with equal seriousness; 'I can quite understand his getting dazzled and losing his head,' with a

look into Lucy's glorious eyes which expressed more eloquently than words that this part of his parable applied particularly to his own case.

'I should have thought he'd have had too much practice in that kind of thing,' Lucy said carelessly, as though only the bungling plumber was in question.

'"That kind of thing" isn't likely to come often in his way.'

'Is it so magnificent?' asked Lucy mockingly, with raised eyebrows.

'The conservatory? I wasn't thinking of the conservatory. But come and see, and judge for yourself.'

'It would be too overpowering,' she replied with a saucy shake of the head, which tested the security of the knot she had just made of her back hair. 'Besides——' Here she checked herself in seeming confusion.

'Yes?' he asked eagerly. 'Besides?'

'Nothing.'

'Do tell me.'

'Well,' she answered audaciously, 'I don't mind much being fished, but I do object to being shot.'

He laughed, and the laugh softened his face for the moment pleasantly, almost winningly.

'Birds of Paradise are strictly preserved,' he answered with a gallant bow.

'A little Bird of Paradise told me a very different story.'

'Who?'

'The vicar.'

Here he laughed again at this description of the vicar as 'a little Bird of Paradise.' But, checking himself midway, he added with a sudden assumption of melodramatic fierceness. 'Ah, if I'd only known he was going to poison your mind—— Dead men tell no tales.'

'You'd better massacre Burnside, then.'

'Why? what does Burnside say?'

Again Lucy shook her head. 'I'm not going to have the blood of a whole village on my conscience.'

'Give me a chance to clear myself, and I give you their lives,' he answered, with a Haroun-al-Raschid wave of the hand.

'Oh, I don't belong to the parish,' Lucy answered, with the slightest and daintiest possible shrug of her shoulders, to express indifference about such petty Burnside concerns as the villagers' lives or the baronet's character. Perhaps she was not unwilling at the same time to intimate, both by her words and her manner, that she knew the world, and the worth of the badinage of the over-bold baronet. She was flattered by it, of course, and felt something of the triumph of Una when the dreaded lion, instead of rending her to pieces,—

'Licked her lily hands with fawning tongue—
O, how can beauty master the most strong!'

But she could see plainly enough that Timon, however much of a misanthropist he might be, was certainly no misogynist—that the Anchorite was no St. Anthony; and she knew that the admiration of men of this stamp was like the camomile in Falstaff's

description of it, 'the more it is trodden on the faster it grows.' Wherefore she said contemptuously, 'Oh, I don't belong to the parish.'

'If you had, I shouldn't have cared to clear myself to you,' he replied, meaning thereby to intimate that he had never been so stupid as to suppose her one of the aborigines. 'It's not fair to hear only one side, is it? If you will take your seat on the bench,' pointing to a bench on the river-bank, 'you may be judge, jury, plaintiff, and prosecuting counsel, all in one.'

'But there are so many stories; it would take days——'

'So much the better,' he interrupted her to say with evident and eager sincerity.

'And I don't know half of them, besides,' continued Lucy, without heeding the interruption. 'However, if you are really anxious to hear all the gossip of Burnside about you——'

'Yes?' eagerly.

'I can send you the vicar.'

'I don't think you can,' he said, laughing

at this sudden and saucy turn, and also at the effective scare he had given the vicar. 'Seriously, though,' he added, on perceiving that he had gone far enough, if not too far, in this cavalier strain, 'I hope that no silly stories will keep you from coming here when you like, as long as you are in the neighbourhood.'

'And the gates are open?' Lucy said, smiling archly, greatly pleased by his change of manner.

'They seem to open to you, and I don't wonder,' he replied with a bow.

'But they weren't shut to-day,' Lucy hastened to explain, anxious to free herself of the suspicion of intrusion.

'Not till after you had got in fortunately.'

'Are they now?'

'Certainly. Giant Despair has you in his power, and will keep you there as long as he is Giant Despair—till you forgive him.'

'We are quits, I think; both have been trespassing.'

'I shall not consider myself forgiven if

you regard your coming here as a trespass. If you will do me the honour to accept a key of the "Cradock Gate," as it is called—the little gate leading into Briary Lane—you can come here when you please, unnoticed by the Burnside busybodies.'

'You are very good; but I couldn't think of intruding——'

'You do not really think that I've the bad taste to consider your coming here an intrusion, or anything else than a compliment. You mean that you do not forgive me.'

Lucy shook her head. 'I should get into one of the stories,' she said solemnly.

'But you "don't belong to the parish,"' he retorted, quoting her own words against her. 'Besides, there's no need to let the parish know of your *open Sesame.* I shall not even send you the key, which I have not unfortunately about me. If you will come here to-morrow at this hour—or,' he added hastily, 'send your maid here for it, I shall myself give it into her hand.'

'It is really very kind of you——'

'The kindness is to me, and you will not refuse it to me,' he said pleadingly.

'Thank you; I shall send to-morrow for it. It is very good of you.'

Lucy was as much surprised as gratified by his sudden change of tone from banter to deferential earnestness; and she at once took the cue herself and became serious to ceremoniousness. She flattered herself that his change of manner was due to his perception of her being his social equal; and, no doubt, his respect for her had so far increased that he felt he must try another tone than that of cavalier *persiflage* to induce her to meet him here again. He had never seen a lovelier girl, and had hardly ever conversed with a readier or wittier; and her beauty and brightness made the more impression upon him when set against such a dead background as Burnside. She seemed like Perdita, so much 'too noble for this place.' Wherefore his heart was set upon her meeting him here again; to which, plainly, she could be brought to consent only by a show of perfect respect.

His suggestion that she should send her maid to-morrow for the key was offered not only to reassure her as to his respect and disinterestedness, but also with a view of finding out all about her from the Abigail—for our fine friend was by no means above pumping a servant for serviceable information.

Having secured Lucy's hesitating consent to this arrangement, he at once changed the subject lest she might revoke it on second thoughts—of which there was not the least danger. As a fisherman, he knew that a salmon which has just taken the bait needs plenty of play and line and the delusion that nothing alarming has happened to it. Accordingly, he proceeded to talk with drawing-room formality of the book which Lucy had dropped in her first terror, and which he had long since picked up. It was *Vanity Fair* which Rowan had recommended to her as the most powerful novel in our language.

'I shouldn't have thought,' he said, as he

glanced at the title, 'that you would care for *Vanity Fair.*'

'I'm not sure that I do. I don't care even in imagination to be shut up in Doubting Castle by Giant Despair.'

'It's better than being shut up in the fool's paradise of other novelists.'

'I don't know that it is. Even a fool's paradise is a wholesomer place to live in than a knave's paradise, where all the good people are idiots.'

'It seems to be the universal experience though,' he replied, laughing. 'What does "silly" mean in old English, or "an innocent" in modern English; or "selig" in German; or "benêt" in French; or "crétin," that is "Chrétien," in Switzerland?'

'Don't you think that the words tell the other way? Kindliness made people choose the gentlest names for those who were thus afflicted.'

'I never thought of that,' he said, as though suddenly and completely convinced; 'and I really believe you are right.'

'You are readily convinced,' replied Lucy archly, naturally suspecting the sincerity of so swift a conversion.

'Yes; but not by your words only,' he said, raising his hat, and leaving Lucy to discover for herself the underlying compliment.





CHAPTER IV.

BRISEIS.

Lucy indemnified herself for the payment of part of Jessie's wages by appropriating a more than proportionate share of the girl's time—to the frequent and querulous disgust of her aunt. In truth, what household work Jessie did was incidental and almost complimentary (in her own eyes); her main and proper business being attendance upon Lucy. Martha grumbled incessantly and drearily as a Scotch drizzle about this grievance, with as much effect as a Scotch drizzle upon a Highlander. Both Lucy and Jessie got so used and hardened to her complaints that they hardly troubled themselves to reply to them. Both knew that there was not the least danger of Martha's resort to the single

revenge and remedy in her power,—Jessie's dismissal,—for the possession of such an exquisitely pretty, neat, and accomplished waitress was in itself a great distinction in Burnside. So at least Martha thought; and she stood accordingly in much greater fear of Jessie's giving notice than Jessie did of getting it. Martha grumbled of course and with cause; but she was given to grumbling, and was indeed so used to it herself that she expected others to disregard it. In this expectation neither Lucy nor Jessie disappointed her. Jessie might have minded it if Lucy had not spoken to her of this habit of her aunt's as though it was the hacking cough of a consumptive patient, which, however distressing to listen to at first, would in time and by use become endurable. Indeed, she even explained and excused the habit to her handmaiden, as a doctor might account by climate for consumption. 'It's living in Burnside,' she said with a slight shrug. And Jessie was quick enough to understand her to mean that the patient Griselda herself

would grow to be a grumbler in so tiresome a place.

The outlandishness of the place drew mistress and maid closer together, as Livingstone and Stanley were drawn together in the savage heart of Africa; so that Lucy confided everything to Jessie much more unreservedly than she would have confided it to Mary; and Jessie, for her part, retailed, unrebuked, to Lucy all the tittle-tattle of the village. Of late this tittle-tattle was, of course, all about the mysterious baronet, of whom Jessie never tired of speaking. Not one of the grim or gruesome village stories about him escaped her ears or her memory, so that Lucy had heard from her all the monstrous things that made her believe in his madness.

When, therefore, Jessie opened the door for Lucy on her return from her encounter with Giant Despair, the mistress breathlessly bid the maid follow to her room.

'Shut the door—Jessie, I've seen him!'

Jessie looked perplexed, not supposing it possible that she meant the baronet.

'Bluebeard!' added Lucy in explanation; 'I spent an hour with him.'

'The baronet, Miss Lucy?' exclaimed Jessie.

'Yes; the baronet. I told you those stories were all rubbish. He's the pleasantest man I have ever met, and the wittiest, and the handsomest.'

Jessie said—for she could say—nothing. She stared as though she gazed at a ghost.

'You'll see him for yourself to-morrow.'

'Me, miss!' exclaimed Jessie, as though Lucy had suggested to her a solitary midnight visit to the rifled graves in the abbey churchyard.

'Yes, you.' Then Lucy told her the adventure from first to last, not without the interruption of many exclamations of amazement from the bewildered Jessie; who, however, was struck dumb when her own part in the piece was proposed to her. As she said nothing, Lucy continued, 'He knows my name, so you have only to say you are Miss Lisle's maid, when you meet him, and he will give you the key.'

'I daren't, Miss Lucy; I daren't, indeed,' gasped Jessie at last.

'Daren't what?'

'Meet him alone, miss. He may be right at times, or at any time with you, miss; and he hadn't his pistols to-day——'

'Don't be silly, Jessie. Those stories are all nonsense. He set them going himself for his own amusement, and to keep Burnside people away.' But it took a good many such assurances to persuade Jessie to undertake the adventure, even though the mysterious baronet had a kind of serpent-like fascination for her. At last, however, she was persuaded; and on the following day Lucy condescended to reverse their relation by assisting at Jessie's toilet. She made the girl, too, a present of some of her own things, partly in payment of this service and partly to equip her to greater advantage. When, however, the toilet was completed, and Lucy, with her head critically on one side, surveyed Jessie from head to foot, the mistress had a sudden misgiving that she had helped to make

the maid a great deal too pretty—irresistibly pretty. Never, except in the glass, had Lucy seen so bewitching a face. Now the baronet, as Lucy had good reason to know, was over-bold, and over-bold gallants preferred to flirt with girls of the milliner class, who, regarding their audacity rather from a social than a sexual standpoint, would not resent it. Wherefore the severely proper Lucy thought it as well to caution her handmaiden after the manner following:—

'There, Jessie, you look a lady; and if you would act the part out you must be dignified.' Thus she spake, thinking this the most effective motive for discretion she could suggest to Jessie. Jessie was immensely flattered.

'I shall be too frightened for anything, miss,' she answered, while taking a gratifying glance at herself in the glass.

'You'll have only one thing to fear; and I hope you will fear it—his making too free.'

'Not with me, miss,' Jessie cried, with a

prompt and prim positiveness, which strengthened Lucy's misgivings.

'He's the kind of man who will respect a girl only so far as she respects herself; and if you should let him think you a mere servant-maid he is as likely as not to chuck you under the chin, or take some other low liberty of that kind.'

'I hope I know my proper place, miss,' Jessie cried, expressing some offence through a slight toss of the head.'

'I am afraid of him forgetting himself, not of you,' Lucy replied somewhat severely.

Whether Lucy had served her immediate purpose or not by this premonitory lecture, she had indirectly and unconsciously served her original purpose of dispelling the girl's grisly fears of Bluebeard. As courage comes by custom, and we slight the dangers to which we have grown used, Jessie saw little reason to shudder at the prospect of meeting a man whose ferocity was likely to take the form suggested by her mistress. Even his vast strength and stature, which had struck her

as satanic when Lucy had described them, seemed now to her by no means horrific—Jessie, as became not only a woman but a little woman, worshipped thews and sinews. Wherefore she set out upon her mission in much better heart than she had expected; and it was not until she drew near the tryst that yesterday's terrors returned upon her in some force. As she walked along the path by the river, whose murmur served only to make, so to say, the dead afternoon stillness audible, she was oppressed and even terrified by the loneliness of the place. What if Sir Edward really had mad moods, and happened to be in one of them to-day? Her helplessness, the solitude, the river, were all temptations to murder! This terror so grew upon her that she began to breathe short and fast, and to feel as though she was being stifled. Suddenly she stopped and turned to fly in a kind of hysterical panic, only to come at an elbow in the path face to face with her fear. She uttered an exclamation that was almost a scream as she recognised at once 'the

handsomest man ever seen' of Lucy's description—or rather of her version of her mistress' description. If he was a madman, he had certainly singular presence of mind, for, on her crying out, he at once put his arm round her waist.

'You are ill? Let me help you to a seat. A sudden faintness? You will be right in a moment.' While uttering these broken sentences of alarm and solicitude he lifted her clean off her feet with one arm, and carried her, seemingly as easily as she carried her parasol, to a seat a few paces off. Plainly, whether he thought her ill or not, he certainly thought her extraordinarily pretty. Having set her down on the seat he asked anxiously, 'Shall I fetch you a little water or wine?'

Jessie was reassured as to his madness, and had even less doubt now of the correctness of the rest of Lucy's description. Being whisked up breathlessly in this helpless fashion gave her the most vivid idea possible of his strength and of his audacity. She

did not at all believe that he thought her ill—or so ill at least as to need being carried like a baby. Therefore she was very angry? No; she was not indeed. If he had caught her up in this way under no pretext, or under a transparent pretext, she would have been angry; but his acting was so perfect that he might well believe it had imposed upon her; and, if he believed this, then what Jessie considered her self-respect was saved. For the rest, his being so extraordinarily strong and handsome and struck with her rendered this little attention rather pleasant than otherwise to Jessie!

When, therefore, he asked her if he might fetch wine or water, she looked up at him with an irresistible expression of appealing helplessness in her round blue eyes—

'No, thank you, sir. I was only startled.'

'Startled! It's I that should have been startled, child. You can see men like me any day by the dozen; but one doesn't see a face like yours, my dear, once in a twelvemonth. You're Miss Lisle's maid, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Most extraordinary!' he said, standing in front of her and looking down into her face as though he saw in it an unaccountable likeness to some one. 'To come to the back of the world to find the two prettiest faces I've ever seen, and they mistress and maid! Most extraordinary,' he repeated as dispassionately as though he was soliloquising upon the discovery of a botanical curiosity. Jessie drooped her artless eyes and blushed becomingly. The scientific tone in which the compliment was paid seemed to guarantee its sincerity.

'Why, child, you're trembling still!' taking and keeping in his her little gloved hand. 'You're not—— What is your name?'

'Jessie, sir.'

'Why, Jessie, you're not afraid of me?'

'No, sir,' with a shy upward glance into his admiring eyes.

'You've been hearing all kinds of dreadful stories about me, Jessie; haven't you, now?'

Jessie kept an embarrassed silence.

'Come, tell me,' he said, seating himself beside her on the bench. As he sat down Jessie rose respectfully.

'Sit down, child,' he said, coolly putting his arm round her to draw her down beside him. Then he withdrew his arm and recaptured her hand. 'Well, what do they say about me, Jessie?'

'It's only foolish gossip, sir.'

'But you believe it?'

'Not now, sir,' replied our shy little maid, raising her artless eyes trustfully to his, but at the same moment making an effort to disengage her hand.

In such situations the vacillation of girls like Jessie is due, not to the promptings of conscience or of modesty, but to their idea of the impression they are making on the enemy. 'What is he thinking of me now?' is the one question they ask themselves, and its answer is the sole compass by which they steer. If, for example, Jessie tried to withdraw her hand from his, it was simply because she imagined he would think less of her if she had not.

'No, no, Jessie; I'll keep you in prison till you tell me them'—a frightful threat, which yet failed to extort from Jessie the unflattering stories; wherefore her little hand remained imprisoned as a hostage. 'They're too horrible to tell, eh?' he continued, as Jessie remained silent. 'Well, then, if you will talk only of pretty things, tell me about Miss Lisle.'

Hereupon Jessie, in answer to his questions, became very communicative, and drew for him a most flattering picture of Lucy's social and personal claims to respect. When she had almost told him everything he cared to ask about, there came this sudden and singular interruption to their *tête-à-tête*.

The back of the bench on which they sat was the bole of a giant oak, still in full though faded leaf, whose trunk, about nine feet from the ground, divided into four colossal boughs. From this seat, in the midst of one of Jessie's answers, he started suddenly to whisper, 'Hush! stand up!' When Jessie, in alarm, had promptly obeyed him, he put his hands

beneath her arms, set her standing on the bench, mounted it himself, and, putting again his hands beneath her arms, he raised her above his head, and seated her securely in the wide lap of the oak. Then whispering hurriedly, 'Hush! I shall be back presently,' he stepped down from the bench and sauntered abstractedly along the path.

'The mad fit is upon him,' thought Jessie in horror; but before she could collect her terrified thoughts to decide upon what she was to do, she saw there was method in his madness. He had not gone many steps along the path when he met at the turn, where he had come upon Jessie, two men, whose voices or footsteps his quick ear must have heard when he hid his compromising companion in the oak. One of the two was evidently a gamekeeper, and the other Jessie would have taken for a stable-help if he had not thus familiarly accosted Bluebeard, 'Halloa! It's here you are!' he cried excitedly. 'I want satisfaction, and I mean to have it.' He was a fiery little man—hair,

beard, face, eyes even, red and fierce as his temper.

'All right,' replied Bluebeard; 'when and where you please.'

'Here and now,' shouted the little man, drawing out his revolver with one hand and with the other waving back Bluebeard.

'Pooh!' replied Bluebeard coolly; 'the park's full of people. Come back to the abbey.' The foxy little man hesitated for a moment, but then turned suddenly and sullenly, and walked back with Bluebeard the way he had come—the gamekeeper following them at a few respectful paces behind.

'A duel!' thought Jessie at first, and the thought turned her cold with terror. Presently, however, it occurred to her that the little red man was the maniac, whose outrageous acts gave rise to all the wild or weird stories afloat in the village. The more she thought of it the more certain she became of this explanation of the mystery. Probably the little red madman was Sir Edward Dromore himself, and Bluebeard was the

friend who had come in kindness to take care of him. It took Jessie some time to think all this out, and some time longer to consider her own helpless case. What was she to do? She could not get down if she would, nor would she if she could, so long as there was any fear of the lunatic being at large, or any hope of Bluebeard's return.

But a hope of help came at last. Two men—one of them the gamekeeper who had accompanied the little red man, and the other seemingly an underkeeper—came in sight round the sudden turn in the path. To them Jessie could appeal to help her down, and to escort her through the park. But how was she to explain to them her extraordinary imprisonment on this perch? While she was thinking of some plausible tale to tell them in explanation, they came and sat upon the bench beneath her. Jessie's fears for the moment were forgotten in her curiosity. Now would she hear something which would throw light upon the mystery.

Each man took out his pipe, filled it with

Dutch deliberation, lit it, and puffed away slowly without interchanging a syllable. Jessie, being Yorkshire herself, however impatient, was not in the least surprised. She would, she knew, be fortunate if she heard anything to the purpose in half an hour.

'Aw thowt soa mysen,' replied at last the underkeeper in answer to something his companion had said five minutes before. After this effort there was the sociable silence of smokers for some minutes, then the gamekeeper took the pipe from his mouth, puffed upwards such a volume of smoke as almost made Jessie cough, and said, with all the impressiveness of a judicial charge, 'Sir Ed'ard is a big man, tha knaws."

After a dozen contemplative puffs his companion was able to give his assent: 'Ay,' he said, as he thrust down with his forefinger the glowing embers in the bowl of his pipe.

'He could thraw thee an' me in theer if he'd a mind,' pointing with his pipe to the river; 'an' we daren't stan' up to him,' continued, after

a long pause, the gamekeeper; and after a pause nearly as long his subordinate replied:

'Ay; he's a big man; he is, for sewer;' and then after a dozen puffs he added interrogatively, 'T' other's afeared on him, aw reckon?' with an inquiring look into his companion's face. Before, however, his companion had got together his ideas for a reply, his subordinate started suddenly up with the exclamation, 'By gum! Here he is!' Almost at the same moment the gamekeeper rose; and both men, having respectfully saluted Bluebeard on his approach, hurried away in the opposite direction.

Bluebeard, glancing up as he passed the oak to smile reassuringly at Jessie, followed the men for some distance to make sure of their going clean out of the way, then he returned, mounted the bench, and said, as he looked up winningly into the blushing face above him:

'Did you think I was never coming, little one?'

'No, sir.'

'You were frightened, though?'

'A little, sir.'

'Jessie, you must say nothing about it.'

'No, sir.'

'Come!' holding wide his arms, into which Jessie had perforce to trust herself. He held her in them a little longer perhaps than was absolutely necessary, probably with a stethoscopic intention; for, as he set her down, he said:

'Why, child, your little heart's fluttering like a newly-caught bird; you've been frightened out of your wits.'

'I thought you might be shot, sir.'

'What! you were frightened for me!' he exclaimed, at once gratified and amused. 'You didn't think me big enough to take care of myself, eh?' Jessie looked up into his face with unmistakable admiration of his immense size and strength in her wide, blue eyes. As she expressed this sentiment only through her eyes, he added, to break the silence: 'Did you think he was mad?'

'I didn't know, sir, what to think.'

'It was D. T., if you know what that is.'

'No, sir.'

'Drink, then—that's what it was—drink. But you must say nothing about it; promise me, Jessie."

'I won't, indeed, sir.'

'I'll seal your lips,' he said, stooping and kissing her, as though it was the most natural, and even inevitable thing to do. Before she could (if she would) have expressed any offence or remonstrance he turned the subject to a topic of engrossing interest to Jessie.

'My dear child! your dress is ruined, and, as it was my doing, you must let me get you a new one. This is the key for Miss Lisle; and this is for the dress,' handing her some gold wrapped in paper.

'Thank you, sir,' Jessie replied demurely, with a very pretty curtsey.

'The best way to thank me is to use the key yourself sometimes, Jessie; and if you should use it, and should ever take this path by the river, be sure you look up into the oak as you pass; for, when I'm tired fishing, I sometimes sit there. It was that that made me

think of hiding you there. You *will* come, little one, to tell me all the village gossip about us?' putting his hand under her chin, as he spoke, to raise the winsome little face till it looked in confusion up into his.

'I—I don't know, sir,' Jessie stammered.

'You're not afraid, Jessie?'

Jessie's silence confessed her fear.

'Have I frightened you, Jessie?'

'Oh no, sir,' she replied with flattering promptitude.

'Oh, it's of him you're afraid?'

'Please, sir,' asked she, after summoning all her courage to put the audacious question; 'please, sir, was—was he Sir Edward?' The keepers' conversation had not quite convinced her that she was mistaken in supposing Rufus to be the baronet, because in Yorkshire 'a big man' means as often one socially, as one physically, mighty. She was much mortified, however, by the effect of her question upon Bluebeard; they had been walking back towards Burnside together when she put the question, which brought him to a sudden stand.

'He!' and then he laughed till Jessie was disconcerted and distressed. 'Yes, that was Sir Edward,' he said, when he had somewhat recovered himself. 'And so you're afraid of Sir Edward?' Here he laughed again, but checked himself to add, 'You needn't be the least afraid of him, Jessie; for when Sir Edward is here I'm here, and I'll take care of you, little one. Whenever the park gates are shut to the public you'll be pretty sure to find me here, and then no harm can happen to you. I'll keep Sir Edward in good order,' he said, stopping again to laugh.

Jessie stood before him with downcast eyes, blushing, ashamed, confused—looking bewilderingly pretty. He admired her for a moment or two in silence, and then said:

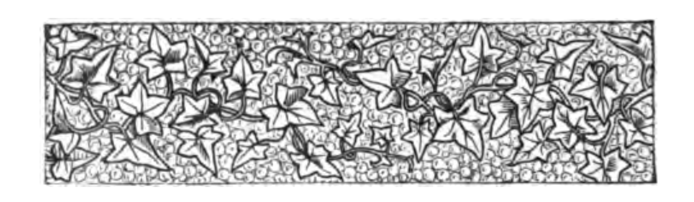
'But, Jessie, you must tell no one that you have seen Sir Edward, or what you saw of him. Mind, I shall hear of it, if you do; for I've others to tell me every word that's said in the village, if you won't.'

'I'll remember, sir,' Jessie replied, much subdued.

'I mean no one, except Miss Lisle. You may tell her everything—but this'—stooping to kiss again her little rosebud of a mouth. 'Good-bye, little one.'

'Good-bye, sir,' replied Jessie demurely. The audacious Bluebeard had long since learned that to do a thing of this kind in a cool matter-of-fact and matter-of-course way was to do it with perfect impunity.

As Jessie made all speed out of the park she thought first about Bluebeard, who was the finest-looking man she had ever seen. Next about her dress—was it really ruined behind? And next about the paper packet in her pocket—how much had he given her? When she had ascertained this—which she did even before she had got clear of the park —she was much surprised and pleased.



CHAPTER V.

'JUST IN TIME.'

WHEN Bluebeard gave Jessie leave to report everything but his caresses to Lucy, he thought the permission and the prohibition alike needless. And so they were. Jessie without them would have been just as communicative about Rufus and as silent about the caresses to her mistress. She had, of course, to describe her being whisked up and deposited in the lap of the oak, 'as easy, miss, as you'd put that muff on that shelf;' but she graced the act with an apology from Bluebeard which he had himself forgotten to make. For the rest, though she was quite as vain, if not vainer, than Lucy herself, she repeated only the compliments he had paid her mistress, and was discreetly silent as to

those he had paid herself. In fact, she represented Bluebeard as interested exclusively and extremely in her mistress from the first word to the last of the interview.

Her report at once delighted and disturbed Lucy. Bluebeard's compliments to her beauty and questions about her position and disposition were very flattering; on the other hand, this little red madman (for Lucy was certain he was not tipsy, but insane) would not be a pleasant person to encounter in one of her lonely visits of privilege—when the public were excluded from the park. Lucy was very much inclined to Jessie's first opinion that Rufus, not Bluebeard, was the baronet. Jessie, it is true, had been laughed out of it; but the laugh, thought Lucy, may have been provoked by something else which Jessie had not the wit to discover. If Bluebeard was Sir Edward, why should he bring this little madman down from London to be his sole companion in that great house? Most probably he was a friend whose strength both of mind and body fitted him to control Sir

Edward's outbursts. That he was a gentleman and socially Sir Edward's equal Lucy had no more doubt than she had of his being the handsomest and most agreeable man she had ever met; but that he was Sir Edward himself she greatly doubted.

This doubt she must resolve at their next meeting. Their next meeting! She dare not meet him again at the risk of an encounter with Rufus and his revolver. Jessie had drawn such an ogreish picture of this ferocious little maniac that Lucy, whose horror of mad people was intense, felt that she dare not make use of the private key. She would walk in the park when it was open to the public, but, when it was closed to them, it should be closed to her also. It was often closed now to the public, so often that admission became the exception and exclusion the rule; and, as this state of things dated from Lucy's possession of the private key, she was not slow to interpret it as a device of Bluebeard's to multiply his chances of a *tête-à-tête* with her. Neverthe-

less she did not dare to use her private key. More than once she set out with the intention of using it, but her courage began to give in Briary Lane, and oozed away altogether when she reached the little gate. The ogre of Jessie's highly-coloured picture seemed to her terrified imagination to be lying in wait at the other side of it for her.

We are not sure that Jessie herself shared the terrors she inspired. At all events Bluebeard learned a great deal about Lucy's fears, feelings, movements, and intentions, that only Jessie could have told him; and that Jessie could have told him only at many interviews. Perhaps Jessie's horror of Rufus was equal to Lucy's, but her trust in the strength of Bluebeard—of which she had had such personal proof—was greater. Anyway, somewhere and somehow Bluebeard heard much of Lucy from Jessie; and the meeting, therefore, that we are about to describe was not the romantic coincidence it seemed.

Mrs. Coulson, the wife of a wealthy manufacturer, was coaxed into giving a picnic by

her son, who was one of Lucy's adorers. As it was rather late in the year for a picnic, it was arranged that the party should not go far; and should not stay long at the rendezvous, but should return early for a quiet dance at the Coulsons' house. Berrybrow was chosen as far the loveliest spot in the immediate neighbourhood for a picnic; and it was hoped that on the day fixed for it the park gates would be open, as the road to it through the park was, not shorter merely, but incomparably prettier than that through the village.

But the park gates were shut upon the appointed day, and no bribe or entreaty would induce the gatekeeper to open them. His orders were so peremptory that he dare not even carry to the abbey an entreaty that the party might be permitted merely to pass through. Deep and deadly was the execration heaped on the head of the churlish baronet, and many were the vows to fight out this right of way to the bitter end in a law court. For the present, however, there

was no help for it. The horses' heads had to be turned round and the long and ugly route through the village taken. The disappointment, however, had the advantage of giving the guests a subject of much interest to talk about—the abandoned baronet. In Lucy's carriage at least nothing else was talked of. Mr. Isaac Coulson, the young gentleman who had devised this entertainment in her honour, retailed to her all the stories he had heard of Sir Edward in the Ribblebridge Club—all, that is, which were decorous enough to bear retailing. Most of these had to do with the turf, and were not as intelligible to Lucy as to Mr. Coulson; who himself plainly regarded the St. Leger as the greatest of all the Christian festivals; for no better reason, we fear, than that the Derby was not run in Yorkshire.

From these stories Lucy learned that Sir Edward drank, gambled, and 'plunged' deeply—that he had once won the St. Leger unfairly, and that, when challenged with this unfairness, he had flung his challenger out of

an upper window and crippled him for life. As this feat seemed to identify Bluebeard as the baronet, Lucy tried to discover what had fouled this greatest of victories; but could not make out much more than that a Yorkshire horse with, apparently, the outrageous name of 'Hellsnore' ought to have won—and ought to have won seemingly because Mr. Isaac Coulson had backed him.

Martha, whose secret sympathies were all with the blue-blooded baronet, didn't think that a horse christened 'Hellsnore' ought to win—not because he must from his name be a 'roarer,' but because Providence was little likely to encourage profanity. This rebuke perplexed Mr. Coulson, until his friend and rival, Mr. Sykes, explained that the horse's name was 'Elsinore,' to the relief of Martha and the confusion of Mr. Coulson. Then Mr. Sykes took up the running, and discussed the merits and chances of a horse of the baronet's called 'Blunderbore,' which was supposed to be among the best, if not the best, of the entries for the next Derby. The

name at once struck Lucy as that Bluebeard had applied to himself as the giant who had caught her by the hair; but even she did not think there was much in the coincidence. Then Mr. Sykes proceeded to describe at great length some piece of sharp practice by which he had overreached a bookmaker. As well as Lucy could make out, the story from a moral point of view redounded less to his credit than to that of the bookmaker's; but in a Yorkshire bet or bargain morality is as pretty an impertinence as the pouncet-box, which disgusted Hotspur on the battlefield. When Greek joins Greek the scabbard is flung aside as an encumbrance.

The silly and sordid talk of Messrs. Sykes and Coulson went, as may be imagined, woefully wide of its mark—Lucy's admiration—for it dwarfed them doubly in her sight, keeping, as it did, before her eyes Bluebeard as a standard of comparison. Long before they reached Berrybrow she was set wondering how she was to get through this insupportable day, and set again and again regretting

that she hadn't made a headache an excuse for remaining at home. With all the suicidal courage of ennui she felt that, had she stayed at home, she would have ventured into the park. There was no help now for it, however; so she sat silent, listening, or affecting to listen, to Mr. Sykes' vapid and vulgar prattle. She could not, even if she would, have taken a bright part in a conversation with such companions. '*Un homme d'esprit serait souvent bien embarrassé sans la compagnie des sots.*' But, on the other hand, if the rest of the company consists exclusively of dolts, our brilliant person can no more shine than a candle can burn in a vacuum.

Mr. Sykes, however, being too much absorbed in himself and his subject to notice Lucy's forbidding silence, rattled away glibly anecdote after anecdote of the turf and of his own astuteness, under the impression that he was showing off brilliantly to her as a man of the world—of a wider world at least than that of Burnside. Alas! to Lucy he seemed the very quintessence of the world of Burn-

side; and in her present mood of irritation his chatter had the rasping effect upon her that the screech of a cockatoo has upon worn-down nerves. She got at last into a state of such fretful and fidgety impatience that she longed to leap out of the carriage and trudge back to Braithwaite. When the carriage pulled up at length at the foot of Berrybrow, she stepped out of it as eagerly as a prisoner from his cell; and, in order to secure a lucid interval of a few minutes to herself, she left the gentlemen busy with the hampers and hurried up the hill alone.

It was not the least of the grievances of the picnic party against the churlish baronet that, while the ascent of Berrybrow from the park was gradual, that from the high road was steep and rugged—especially steep and rugged to those who, like Lucy, did not know the way. As the carriage in which she had come was the first to arrive, and as she had succeeded in slipping away from her party unseen, she had no one to help or guide her, and therefore got soon into terrible diffi-

culties. To work off the high pressure of irritability which, in the last hour, had gradually risen almost to bursting point, she had made a headlong dash up the hill anywhere and anyhow, and soon scaled breathless the outworks of the Brow. Between this little hill in front and the Brow itself lay a shallow valley, into which Lucy descended; and, after resting to recover breath at the foot of the Brow, she began to clamber up what seemed its least precipitous side. And so it was for the first few yards, but thence it became steeper and steeper, till Lucy was at last horrified to find herself standing on a narrow ledge on the face of a sheer precipice. In climbing she had taken a sharp turn round a narrowing ledge of rock, holding by the shrubs which hid from her the smooth nakedness of the cliff above them, until having crept round this abrupt angle she looked up and down. Then she found herself standing on the narrow ledge of a sheer precipice—so sheer that a handkerchief dropped from the Brow above would have

fluttered to the bottom unarrested, or arrested only by the handbreadth of a ledge on which she stood. If she could but catch again the branch of the bush she had just let go, she might creep back round the sharp angle, but the branch had rebounded out of reach. Even without its aid she might creep back (it was but a step), pressing her hands against the slight roughnesses of the rock above, if that single glance downward had not turned her sick and dizzy with horror—a helpless horror that could not utter a cry, or think a prayer. The great cliff seemed to her to sway back and forward, as she stood with her face and outstretched hands pressed against it—faster and faster it seemed to rock, till at last in a sudden and violent lurch back it shook off her hands, her face, her feet. She had fallen back without a cry.

'Just in time!' said Bluebeard coolly, as he set her down in a sitting posture at the first safe seat. Jessie had prepared him to expect Lucy at the Brow about this time, and he imagined that she had also prepared

Lucy to meet him here, though he might have inferred from the little maid's request to him to say nothing of their meetings to her mistress, that she would not inform upon herself. However, on seeing from the top of the Brow Lucy detach herself from the party on its arrival to attempt the hill by a path that no one else was likely to choose, he imagined, as we say, that Jessie had prepared her to meet him, and that Lucy, certain of his being on the look-out for her, had hurried up the hill alone and by a route secure from interruption. Altogether it was not an unnatural induction for a man of Bluebeard's opinion of himself and of the sex to make. Wherefore, he hurried down to meet her, and just caught from above through the bushes a glimpse of her as she was disappearing round the sharp angle. He reached the spot himself only just in time. Glancing round this sharp turn he saw her danger, and feared to startle her by a word. Grasping with his left hand the branch she had let go, he stretched out his right arm to

put it round her, and at that moment she fell back. Here his great strength stood him in good stead, for though, in falling back upon his arm she lost her footing on the ledge, he was able to hold her up in mid-air and draw her firmly to him, and carry her a few paces —grasping with his left hand the shrubs above him—to the first safe seat—a sloppy little hollow on the hillside.

Lucy, though white and still as death, had not fainted, and was not absolutely unconscious. She had a horrible nightmare sense of falling—falling—falling infinitely, the whole huge cliff thundering down after her—upon her—with a deafening roar. Gradually its granite outline began, as in a dream, to assume the features of the face that bent above her. 'Where am I?' she asked with wide, bewildered eyes.

'In a puddle, I'm afraid,' he answered, in a commonplace conversational tone. 'Let me help you to a drier place.' So saying he put again his arm around her, raised her up, and, half-leading and half-carrying her, helped

her to a fragment of fallen rock, a few yards lower down, on which he seated her.

Lucy, meanwhile, as one waking slowly from a dream, came gradually to herself and to a clear knowledge of all that had happened to her, except her rescue. But that—how had that happened? How had this man of all others dropped suddenly as a god from the clouds, at a moment which was to her as the razor edge of eternity? To her mind, in its present shaken state, there seemed something mysterious, supernatural almost, in the opportune and amazing appearance of such a man, at such a moment, in such a place.

While she was thus trying to realise all the strangeness of her rescue, he was gone a few steps farther to the right, where a tiny rill trickled down a cleft in the cliff from which he filled his watch-case with water. Returning, he put it to her lips and said, still in a cool conversational tone, 'It's royal hospitality—as little as possible, but in vessels of gold. However, I shall get you more in a moment.'

While she drank it, she gazed up at him with something almost like awe in the perplexed wonder of her face. When he had returned with some more, and she had drunk it, she continued still to gaze at him with parted lips and wide eyes of wonder. In truth, she had not yet half-recovered from the reeling shock her mind had just received.

'Do you think you're in the other world, and I a shade?' he said, laughing, in answer to her ghost-seeing look, and drawing himself up squarely and substantially before her. Then he added happily enough —

'"These be fine things, an if they be not sprites,
That's a brave god and bears celestial liquor,
I will kneel to him."

You've not crossed the Styx; though, by Jove! you'd just slipped in! Do you know yet where you are?'

'I remember it all,' she replied with a shudder. 'But you?' she added, the perplexed expression in her face interpreting to him the aposiopesis.

'I? Oh, I came on to my cue as the

virtuous hero, "positively his first appearance in that character."' His scoffing Mephistophelian tone did more than anything else could have done to present the thing to Lucy in 'the light of common day.'

'But how did you—what brought you just there, just then?'

'Odic force,' he said sententiously, with an affectation of solemnity.

But Lucy, with the shadow of death still on her face, answered gravely, 'It's very strange!' Then he knew that Jessie could not have prepared her for meeting him, and that her hurrying up the hill alone by that lonely and dangerous path was accidental.

'Pooh!' he answered lightly, 'there was nothing strange in it. I had heard that you would be one of a picnic party that was coming here to-day. I meant to meet you, because you wouldn't meet me. I was on the look-out for you, saw you arrive, saw you separate from your party and climb the hill on this dangerous side, and I hurried down

to help you just in time. *Voilà tout!*' with a shrug.

'I owe you my life,' Lucy said very solemnly.

'Well, pay it. You can pay the debt twice over, if you choose.'

'How?'

'By using that key I sent you, now and then. You've never used it once, have you?'

'No; I was afraid.'

'Of me!'

'Of your guest. Jessie told me——'

'About my cousin? He's right enough. Besides, he doesn't go down there once a month, and when he's there, I'm there. Will you come to-morrow?'

'Yes; I should like to come to thank you——'

'To come is to thank me more than I deserve.'

'I can never thank you enough,' she said with sincere solemnity.

'Don't say that, or think that,' he replied

impatiently. 'The surest way to make any one hate you is to make him feel himself hopelessly in your debt. Now I don't want you to hate me exactly'—looking down upon her with a smile which seemed to express what he did want so eloquently that the colour came back in a flood to Lucy's white face. She rose as a relief to her embarrassment.

'You're not going? You're not strong enough to go yet.'

'Thank you, I'm all right now. Besides, they will miss me.'

'If you don't miss them, that won't matter much.'

'They will think I've come up this way,' Lucy replied, as a delicate way of suggesting that some of the party would follow and find her *tête-à-tête* with him.

As he thought this likely himself he said, 'Well, if you must go, you must allow me to help you.' Instead, however, of taking her back to the regular path, he kept still to the rugged side of the hill, which gave him

the excuse of carrying her bodily over the worst parts, and of supporting her with his arm round her for the rest of the track, till they reached the top. During the ascent Lucy was silent—awed by her miraculous escape from a horrible death; but this escape did not seem to be once in his thoughts. He talked away in his cool, caustic, cynical fashion without ceasing till they gained the summit, when, having pointed out to her the path by which to rejoin her party, he said, 'Say nothing to them of your adventure.'

'I couldn't talk of it, if I would,' she replied gravely.

'You are beginning to hate me. Well, you'll be out of debt to-morrow, and then we shall be friends again. *Au revoir.*' Raising his hat he turned away; and Lucy walked on slowly with the beginning of another feeling for him than hatred in her heart.



CHAPTER VI.

'EO IMMITIOR QUIA TOLERAVERAT.'

We shall return now for a few chapters to Milbank in order to bring our other personages abreast of Lucy. And first of the most meritorious—that is, in the West Riding, of 't' gaffer wi' t' moast brass'—Mr. Holroyd.

Mr. Holroyd was a self-made man, and, like most self-made men, was a hard master. *Eo immitior quia toleraverat*, says Tacitus of a promoted private; and the motto would suit a self-made man to set under the crest of a millstone, which to grind well must first have been well ground itself. That sympathy is born of suffering is just as true and untrue as most commonplaces—as untrue, that is, in a very large minority of cases as it is true in the majority. Some persons are as much

hardened as others are softened by suffering. All depends upon the character of the sufferer. A furnace that would melt gold only hardens a clod of clay.

There is this, besides, to remember of self-made men—that the qualities which in our day and as a rule win them their success are not amiable qualities—a cold heart, a callous conscience, a cunning brain, a griping hand. It is not their success that makes such men hard, greedy, and selfish; it is hardness, greediness, and selfishness that have helped to win them success.

Mr. Holroyd, however, was an unusually good specimen of his class. He could do a generous thing, though not generously, for he never forgot it or allowed you to forget it; he was scrupulously, pedantically truthful, and he was uprightness itself in his dealings. But he was an exacting and an unfeeling master to his men, who were truly less to him than the horses in his stable. The horses were his property, and it therefore concerned him if they were overworked or underfed, if

they were ill or disabled. But it was no concern of his if the men in his employ were overworked, underfed, ill, or disabled. As the labour market was overstocked there was no difficulty in replacing them and no object in offering liberal wages. So far, of course, Mr. Holroyd was like any other manufacturer; but he was unlike the better masters in this—that he put on the screw before he felt it himself. He did not wait for trade to slacken to cut wages down; he cut them down when he could with impunity. He would cut down, too, the wages of men who had grown gray in his service to what he considered the equivalent of their waning strength. And, if he paid as little wages, he exacted as much work as he possibly could, and exacted it with rasping imperiousness. In fact he regarded the matter as a mere matter of bargain; and to be beaten in a bargain is to be beaten in a battle in the West Riding—a stinging and lasting disgrace.

It may be imagined, therefore, that Mr. Holroyd was an unpopular master; that his

men were in a chronic mood of discontent, and that they looked and longed for a chance of having him on the hip.

Now, a short time before the opening of our story they thought they saw such a chance. Mr. Holroyd had got a large French order for machines to be delivered by a certain day,—a short day,—and he had to set at once every wheel in his shop running and running at full speed. Now was the time. His men struck for an advance—not a very heavy advance—of wages; but they had woefully miscalculated their chance and their man. Mr. Holroyd would have fought out the thing doggedly to his last farthing if necessary; but it was not in the least necessary. There was a glut of labour—of skilled labour—in the market; and the week after the men 'flang dahn' their tools they were eagerly taken up by strangers.

Mr. Holroyd had won an easy, quick, and complete victory, and might well therefore have been magnanimous; but he was not at all. He entertained an extraordinarily vin-

dictive feeling towards the unfortunate hands that had turned out, and spoke of them as Lear spoke of his thankless children. To hear him talk you would imagine that his one sole object in building and running his mill and making his fortune was to provide work and wages for these ingrates. It was simply ludicrous to hear him speak of the ingratitude of men, with whose skill and strength he had built up his fortune, and whom he used, and used up, and regarded as a mason regards and uses bricks and mortar. Yet he was sincerely convinced of his being their disinterested benefactor—a benefactor, too, of the highest kind, who gave, not demoralising doles, but honest, wholesome, bracing work.

There are a great many employers of labour who would, if they could, leave their men but their skins, and who yet sincerely regard themselves as philanthropists. It is about as gross and grotesque a self-deception as it would be in a night cabman to regard himself as humane to his horse, because, instead of sending it to the knacker's, he

kept it still alive, and just alive, in his own interest.

Having such an idea of all his men owed him, Mr. Holroyd was naturally exasperated to fury by this futile strike. Its very futility, instead of soothing, exacerbated his rage; for did not the rush of new hands into his shop prove the popularity of his employ? Wherefore he was wild with rage against his late employees, and felt as much aggrieved with any fellow-manufacturer who took one of them into his shops, as the Emperor of Russia might feel with a brother prince who harboured a Nihilist.

As this feeling plays a part in our story, we have been at some pains, at the cost of our readers' patience, to explain it.

The most promising of all the hands who struck was a young fellow named Frank Fearnside, who was what in local phrase is called a 'Bod'—that is, an inventive and expert mechanic. He was always devising ingenious mechanical contrivances, and what he devised he could execute with rare skill,

accuracy, and finish. Being self-taught and Yorkshire he was doubly conceited—ridiculously conceited—but in all other respects he was a downright good fellow—kindly, trusty, and hearty. Like one or two others in the shop he had no wish to strike, but he was carried off his feet in the rush. It was really not possible for him to make the stand he would have made if he could. Yet, though he would if he could have stood out against the movement, he had not the least fear of its result as concerned himself. He, at any rate, was indispensable. He could not fancy the concern going on long without him. But it did. He waited and waited week after week, yet no embassage appeared at his door. Then at last, with the thought of Coriolanus in his heart—'I banish you'—

'Thus I turn my back:
There is a world elsewhere'—

he sought one rival house after another to enrich it with his services—in vain. He found no Aufidius.

Meanwhile things went badly with him at

home. He had a young wife (who believed in him almost as much as he believed in himself) and two little helpless children to support; and he was not only out of work hopelessly, but out of funds also. He had invested what savings he had, after the furnishing of his house, in an expensive lathe, at which he worked in the evenings, and often far into the night. It was his Public House, Club, Mechanic's Institute, and his wife also, according to his wife, who used playfully to denounce it to Rowan as her hated rival.

For Rowan in his clerical days and their better days had visited them more than any other of his parishioners; not merely because he shared Frank's mechanical tastes, but because he liked greatly both him and his wife. For some time, however, after he had entered Mr. Holroyd's employment, Rowan had not been to see them. Not only had his own worries driven them to some extent out of his mind, but his work, which took up all his days, and many of his evenings, left him little time to call on friends.

One evening, however, it occurred to him to look up Frank, of whom he had seen and heard nothing for more than a month. Knowing the man's value he was quite certain that he must have got ere this a good job elsewhere, and his self-reproach for not having been before to see him was not therefore as keen as it would have been if he had known the truth.

When Nancy opened the door at his knock Rowan saw at once a startling change in her—not merely a change in her face—now pale, pinched, and aged—but a change in its expression. He had never seen it without a smile till now, when it looked sour and sullen.

'May I come in?' he asked hesitatively, seeing in it small assurance of a welcome.

Frank, who had been sitting over the dying fire with his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands, had never either stirred or glanced up at Rowan's knock or at his entry. At sound of his voice, however, he turned sharply round with a gleam of what Rowan took for a personal welcome in his eye. But it was not a personal welcome at all.

'Hast ta coomed thro' Holroyd?' he asked eagerly, thinking the hoped-for embassage had come at last. Rowan did not answer immediately, not merely because he did not catch the drift of the question, but also because he was taken so aback by the shocking change in his friend's appearance. Had he met him in the streets he would certainly have passed him by as a stranger. The frank, fearless, fresh-coloured, almost jovial face had withered up as by a blight, or by a year's illness, and looked like the face of a Bastile prisoner—lank, sallow, unshaven, with bloodshot eyes and unkempt hair. In fact, the mainspring of the man's life was snapped—his sturdy and even aggressive self-dependence. He was starving—worse still, his wife and little ones were starving; they could not bear to apply for poor relief; but, worst of all, his faith in himself, which underlay every act, and every word, and every thought, and every hope of his life, was sapped—that is to say, his faith in his self-dependent power to make his way. He still believed that there

was no cleverer mechanic in Milbank or in England; but if he could not get England or even Milbank to believe this, of what use was his cleverness? They *would not* believe it. A sense of monstrous ill-usage was eating out his heart. In the immensity of his self-conceit he imagined that a dead set was made against him on all sides, and why else should he be shut out from every shop? and brooding ever upon this thought he was becoming desperate and dangerous. Of course this morbid state of mind made him certain that Rowan, knowing of his misery, had shunned him intentionally. Probably Mr. Holroyd had singled Frank out from all the rest of the men who struck, and had warned Rowan specially against him. This was poor Frank's interpretation of Rowan's accidental neglect of him.

When he heard Rowan's voice he imagined, as we say, that he had come as an ambassador from Mr. Holroyd, who had at last discovered that the works could not go on without him. Wherefore he asked the question eagerly.

When Rowan had recovered the shock the terrible change in his appearance gave him, he answered, 'No; I came to see how you were getting on.'

Frank turned sharply back and resumed, without another word, his attitude of despair.

'What's the matter? Have you lost—— Are the children well?' Rowan turned to ask anxiously of Nancy. Up to this she had stood with the door-latch in her hand, prepared to shut Rowan out with greater alacrity than she had admitted him; but now the tone of his inquiry after her children (to whom he had been extremely kind) convinced her that they must have misjudged him. Being unnerved and weak with want of food she broke down and began to cry quietly with her apron to her eyes.

'Eh!' she sobbed, 'we thowt yo' 'd fair forsaked us.'

Frank, at sound of her sobs, turned sharply round and snapped out almost savagely, 'Howd thee din, wilt ta?'[1]

[1] 'Howd thee din, wilt ta?' *i.e.* Hold your noise, will you?

'What has happened?' asked Rowan, more and more perplexed. Afraid to provoke another snarl or snap from Frank, she merely glanced towards him and shook her head despondently, thereby giving Rowan the impression that Frank had gone out of his mind. Stepping to him he put his hand upon his shoulder and asked sympathetically:

'Frank, what is it?'

'Nowt,' he replied sullenly.

'Come; tell me; there must be something,' persisted Rowan persuasively.

Frank jumped up as though roused beyond endurance, yet his real feeling was fear of being robbed of even the least of all his grievances. Every one hugs his grievances to his heart, but an egotist most of all, because they flatter his self-importance. He sprang up abruptly, so shaking Rowan's hand off his shoulder, walked to the door, and chucking his cap off the nail behind it, and holding it in both hands, looked into it for a moment, and said then gruffly, 'Awm bahn[1] to t' "*Pat and*

[1] 'Awm bahn,' *i.e.* I'm going.

Hammer." ' The 'Pat and Hammer' (probably a corruption of the Patent Hammer) was a public house much frequented by forgemen and mechanics. Without another word he quitted the house.

On his departure Rowan looked inquiringly into Nancy's face.

'Tha mun forgie him, Mr. Rowan; he's noan hissen, he isn't,' Nancy replied in response to his look:

'Has he been ill?'

'Nay, he's heartsloughted.[1] He's aat o' wark an' can't get noan; an' he's had to part wi' his tools an' his lath' an' ahr bits o' furniture. An' he can't bide to see t' bairns pined——' Here Nancy broke down again. She sank into the rocking-chair, flung her apron over her head, and gave way to a wild passion of tears, rocking herself to and fro.

Rowan, looking round the room, remarked now for the first time that much of its furniture was gone; and, if his tools and lathe were gone also, and his little children lacked

[1] 'Heartsloughted,' *i.e.* heartbroken.

bread, Frank, he thought, might well be morose and moody to madness. Yet it occurred to him that, considering Frank had been little more than two months out of work, this havoc in his home was extraordinary.

'I had no idea of this,' he said to himself, rather than to Nancy; and added then, in a tone of perplexity, 'But he hasn't been so long out of work, Nancy?'

Nancy, understanding at once the drift of the question, answered with a fresh burst of tears, 'Lang eneu to tak' t' wrang roäd. He's goan back way iver sin' t' strike. He niver set fooit insaide a public haase sin' we wor wed (an' that ill be four years come next December) till nah, when he's niver aat o' wan, he isn't.' There was some natural resentfulness in Nancy's tone, of which she seemed to be a little ashamed, for she hastened to add, 'But he's noan hissen, isn't Frank. Iverything an' ivery wan has turned agin him till he's amoast aat of his mind; an' when he sits at t' hearthstane he can't bide to turn his heead to see t' bare walls or t' bairns' white faces;

an' if they spak' till him—puir things!—he jumps up an' is off like t' crack of a gun to t' "Pat an' Hammer." Aw doan't knaw what's to become on us; aw doant, awm sewer,' cried poor Nancy, breaking down badly again.

Rowan remained silent for a little, amazed and distressed by this account of a man whose steadiness and success he had considered absolutely assured. At length he said, 'I should have thought that Frank could get work anywhere. He was the handiest man in Milbank.'

'He wor, for sewer. Ivery wan cracked on him as maister of his job, till t' strike; but nah t' gaffers are as mich agin him as if he'd coomed aat o' Wakefield'—'Wakefield' standing for Wakefield jail—'Eh, Mr. Rowan, if tha nobbut could get Holroyd to tak' him back it 'ud be t' savin' on him—it would that.'

'I shall do what I can, Nancy; but Mr. Holroyd is very much set against the men who struck, and, I'm afraid, nothing will persuade him to take even Frank back.'

'Eh, whativer mun we do, then? Tha knaws, Mr. Rowan, that Frank wor agin t' strike all t' way thro'; for thee an' him had it ovver together, yo' mind, when tha coomed as a parson. He said to thee, did Frank, that it wor all nowt, but he couldn't stan' aat agin t' rest, he said; and yo' didn't see yourself that he could. It warn't like, yo' said.'

Rowan, who had completely forgotten the conversation, recalled it now distinctly, and saw in it some hope of getting Frank reinstated. If he put as strongly as he could before Mr. Holroyd Frank's opposition to the strike at first, and unwilling and enforced acquiescence in it at last, surely he could induce the master to take so valuable a man back into the shop.

'Of course I remember,' he cried, starting up impulsively. 'He said he had done all he could to make the men see there was no sense in it; but that no one would listen to him, and that if he had stayed in alone his life would have been made miserable. And so it would; and I said it would. I shall see

Mr. Holroyd to-night about it, Nancy; but say nothing to Frank, as it may come to nothing.'

'Nay, if he knawed aw'd axed thee to spak' for him he'd be mad. Aw can mak' nowt on him nah, he's goan soa queer.'

'And say nothing to him of this either,' he said, putting some money into her hand. 'It's for the children. I meant to have brought them something,' he hastened to say, fearing offence and refusal.

This gift of money, though made so considerately, brought home miserably to Nancy their changed circumstances. She wept afresh and in silence for a little and said then, 'Aw neer thowt on this, Mr. Rowan, when aw seen thee last. But no wan knaws!'

'Don't lose heart, Nancy; it will all come right. What time do you go to bed?'

'When t' public haase looses moastly nah,' Nancy answered with a little bitterness in her tone.

'At eleven? Well; if I've good news, I shall call again before eleven.'

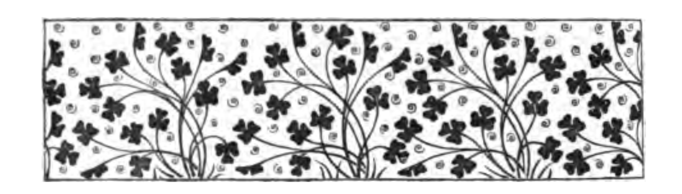
'Aw s'oud ha' knawn thee better,' was all that Nancy could say, thereby expressing her remorse for having misjudged him.

Rowan hurried from the house to go straight to Mr. Holroyd. He often spent an hour in the evening with his employer to talk over, either the work in progress, or some contemplated improvement in machinery. At times the talk turned on the late strike and on the hideousness of the men's ingratitude, when Rowan with foolish and futile good-nature—or rather frankness—would attempt to defend the men from the monstrous charges made against them by his employer. These attempts Rowan now regretted greatly, as they would be certain to prejudice his pleadings in Frank's favour; for Mr. Holroyd had learned to regard him as a kind of *advocatus diaboli*, who took the wrong side from perversity and not from conviction.

Having turned all this well over in his mind, Rowan decided that the most effective way of pleading Frank's cause to Mr. Hol-

royd was to lay the chief stress upon his client's singular mechanical skill and cleverness. Mr. Holroyd was rather given—as Rowan had ere this discovered—to sucking other folks' brains; and, if he thought Frank's brains were worth sucking, he would certainly reinstate him. Rowan would of course press the point also of Frank's opposition to the strike, but he would dwell most upon the man's handiness and inventiveness as likely to have most weight with Mr. Holroyd.





CHAPTER VII.

A WAY TO 'MAK' T' MILL STRIKE.'

'JOHN BULL' is a strange nickname for an Englishman to adopt, signifying as it does animalism, stupidity, and ferocity. There is, indeed, to be said for it that it expresses roughly the national character in the rough; for any one who has mixed much with the class in this country for whom civilisation has done nothing more than add to its animal joys the pleasures of beer, betting, and tobacco, must admit that the bull of all creatures best symbolises its characteristics.

The bull does not adequately symbolise, however, the characteristics of a higher class, for whom civilisation has done its utmost in giving it a religion—the worship of money. In the great centres of energy, enterprise,

and intelligence—the northern towns—you will hear almost as much about money in a public-house parlour, as in the dining-room of the manufacturer or merchant prince. Not, of course, in public houses of the lowest class, where beer and betting are all in all, but in houses of a little higher class.

Such a house was the 'Pat and Hammer,' which was the resort, for the most part, of skilled artisans, forgemen, and mechanics. It was in its parlour that the strike of Mr. Holroyd's hands was suggested, planned, and organised; and during its short progress and after its collapse most of the leaders and many of the rank and file met there for mutual encouragement and comfort. It was only after its collapse that Frank Fearnside frequented the place; for hitherto he had regarded public houses as the devil's pig-troughs, where his swine were fattened for their fate. Now, however, there was no more regular or reckless frequenter of the 'Pat and Hammer' than Frank, who went there first for the relief of talking and of hear-

ing of 'his wrongs,' but finally for the relief of forgetting them in intoxication. It was curiously characteristic of Frank, by the way, that he never, in speaking of the futile strike to its instigators, reminded them of his own justified opposition to it—and this, not from magnanimity, but from his devouring rage with Mr. Holroyd, and from his absorption in his own individual grievances against all masters, the whole world and fate.

On the evening of Rowan's visit Frank, it will be remembered, declared defiantly that he 'wor bahn to t' "Pat and Hammer,"' whither he went and where he found representatives of the two classes we have described above —the lowest class, to whom beer and betting were everything, and the highest class, to whom 'brass' was everything. Besides these there were two or three of the men who had struck, and who, like Frank, were still out of work. In the bar the repudiation of some bets made on a disputed dog race formed the subject of a conversation, which we are unable to quote because of its strongly-

religious character. By the way, we have often wondered what an Englishman of the lower class would be without religion. He is dumb enough as it is; but he would be as dumb almost as the beasts that perish if religion had not lent him adequate language for the expression of his morose and misanthropic feelings.

The men at the bar, however, who used this tremendous language were not the regular *clientèle* of the 'Pat and Hammer,' but casuals who were tolerated, and barely tolerated, by the landlord. In an inner room sat the select circle on whose custom he mainly depended—forgemen, mechanics, and artisans. The conversation of this select circle which Frank had joined was at first less lively than that of the casuals, was, in truth, for some time hardly alive. The minds of the men were of such extraordinary depth—like that of the draw-well of Truth itself—that it took a long time to let anything down into them, and a time equally long to fetch up anything from them. Therefore, short as is the con-

versation we are about to record, it took up the better part of an hour.

One of the strikers, an enormous man with an expression like that of a ruminating ox in his broad face, took out his pipe, erupted from his vast mouth a volcanic column of smoke, drank down about a pint of ale, smacked his lips, and said then at last with judicial deliberateness:

'Ned Sucksmith's got in at Tordoff's.'

This really was startling news, yet it took him some little time to announce it, and it was some little time too before another of the strikers, a 'stiff' man in local phrase (thick-set, that is) answered in a tone of surprise:

'Nay, for sewer!'

Spinks, the bovine communicator of the news, smoked away slowly in stolid silence—having no idea that he was expected to confirm even by a grunt a piece of intelligence so surprising. And, indeed, he was not expected to say a word in its confirmation. After a pause of a minute or two Spinks again withdrew his pipe, stooped to knock

out the ashes from it on the first bar of the grate, and said, as he leaned back in his chair:

'Thirty shillin' a week.'

'Ay!' exclaimed the stiff man, drawing a long breath. Frank, who up to this had sat neither smoking, nor speaking, nor apparently listening, for his eyes were fastened with a kind of fierce intensity on the red heart of the fire, here struck the table a blow with his clenched fist that ought to have split it. The news that this Ned Sucksmith, one of the strikers, who was little better than a 'waster,' had been 'set on' by Tordoff at thirty-shillings a week, while he, Frank, could not get in anywhere at any wage, stirred his smouldering fury into a sudden blaze. At sound of this tremendous blow the other men looked round almost as coolly and languidly as though, hearing the door open behind them, they were curious to see who the incomer might be. It was 'nobbut Frank, who was a bit fresh—as usual.' And truly Frank was 'fresh'—tipsy, that is—as usual. Not being used to stimulants he was soon intoxicated.

Among the men who looked round at Frank was a sallow and sickly-looking mechanic, with a lower jaw which was both undershot and awry (for it had been broken), and a pair of small, dull, snake-like eyes—a sinister-looking little man. As the originator and organiser of the strike, he had incurred the special detestation of Mr. Holroyd, who had prosecuted him for the theft of some tools, which the man, when the strike broke out, had taken home as his own. There was a good deal of hard swearing on both sides; but, on the whole, the weight of evidence must have been on the side of the accused, or he would certainly not have been acquitted, as he was. The prosecution, however, damaged his chances of employment almost as seriously as a conviction would have done; and he, therefore, far outwent Frank in his hatred of Mr. Holroyd.

This venomous-looking little man, whose name was Waud, continued to peer out of his narrowed eyelids at Frank for some time

after the other men had looked back into the fire. Presently he said, with his eyes still fixed on Frank :

'He'll noan be lang in Tordoff's, willn't Sucksmith'—an observation which it took the company a little time to digest. At length, however, our 'stiff' friend said again (interrogatively this time), 'Ay ?'

'Ay,' rejoined Waud affirmatively. By this time Spinks had turned his ruminant face towards Waud and looked at him with a dreamy kind of perplexity in its expression. However, there was nothing more said on either side by the space of half a dozen puffs of their pipes. Then Spinks said :

'It's two shillin' a week better nor he had at Holroyd's.'

'Aw knaw that,' replied Waud ; '*he*'ll noan quarrel wi' job ; but he'll noan draw more nor a week's wage at it, aw reckon. He'll get t' sack when Holroyd hears on it, an' he'll hear on it afore a week's aat.'

'Nay, Holroyd 'll ne'er mell on[1] him,' our

[1] 'Mell on,' *i.e.* interfere with.

'stiff' friend remarked rather contemptuously.

'Noa! An' he ne'er melled on Clough an' Mounsey? He ne'er melled on Bob Barraclough? He ne'er melled on Frank here, who'd ha' gotten two paands a week an' better in any shop i' Milbank, if Holroyd hadn't boycotted him? Aw tell thee he said to Briggs, in Ben Tibbets' hearing, that he'd stop every earth in Milbank agin' us an' drive us aat o' t' place, or into t' Bastile.'[1]

Here Frank, whom Waud watched like a cat, uttered through his clenched teeth a terrible imprecation.

A man named Hirst, who, not being one of the strikers, could look at the matter impartially, was so shocked, not by Frank's curse itself, but by the concentrated bitterness of the tone in which it was uttered, that he felt called on to say something on Mr. Holroyd's behalf.

'He's straight aat, is Holroyd—he'll noan hit below t' belt.'

[1] 'Bastile,' *i.e.* the workhouse.

'Ay, an' he's made a seet o' brass,' said another, who, being also disinterested, could see that the accused had great compensating virtues.

'Hah has he made it? He's picked t' flesh aff ahr boines, an' then flang 'em aat on to t' dust heap,' retorted Waud excitedly.

'A man mun look aat for hissen, tha knaws,' Hirst said, as though he were quoting from the Sermon on the Mount; and, indeed, as the maxim was the very foundation of the religion of their lives, it was unquestionable and unquestioned. Waud, knowing that the only way to meet a text was—not to contradict it flatly and profanely—but to set another text against it, replied:

'Ay, that's reet eneu; but, tha knaws, a man s'ould live an' let live. Awm noan agin his gettin' all t' brass he can through them as has it; but is it reet to put t' screw dahn on t' warking-man, wi' nobbut his bit o' wage between his bairns an' t' Bastile?'

Waud 'had no children,' but he was speaking, and speaking very effectively, at Frank, to

whom this idea of his bairns begging their bread from 't' Bastile' was torture like that caused by the dropping of vitriol into a gaping wound.

But Waud's appeal was an effective *argumentum ad hominem* also to the rest of his audience, who, though they could see that, speaking generally, selfishness, sharp practice, and money-making by any means were the first principles of life, yet resented not unnaturally the particular application of these principles against themselves.

'Nay, it's agin' all raison,' said the 'stiff' man, after he had taken his pipe out, and expectorated noisily.

'A warking-man has as mich reet to live as a maister, for aught aw knaw,' Hirst observed contemplatively.

'Tha knaws nowt, thin,' replied Waud viciously. 'A warking-man has no reet to live, if a maister's noan i' t' mind to let him. There's noan a warking-man in Milbank as wick[1] o' head an' hand as Frank here, an' t'

[1] 'Wick,' *i.e.* quick.

lad's been kicked like a dog aat of ivery shop in t' place, till he's heartsloughted. What's browt him here to-neet, and ivery neet? It's t' faces of his wife and bairns, an' nowt else, aw tell thee. He cannot bide to see 'em pined to deeath afore his eyes; and all because of that ——, —— slave-driver, Holroyd.' Here Frank, fired to frenzy with drink, and this vivid presentation of his wrongs and wretchedness, started up, flung his empty glass into the grate with a curse, and staggered from the room.

'Nay, mun, tha s'ould let him be,' remonstrated Hirst.

'T' lad's best at hoam,' replied Waud, coolly; 'an' it's abaat time I wor theer mysen, aw reckon, gooid-neet, all.'

Waud, having left the 'Pat and Hammer' in a slouching and leisurely way, walked quickly when out of sight of it till he overtook Frank.

'Art ta bahn hoam, Frank?' he asked, putting his hand on his shoulder.

'Ay,' replied Frank gruffly.

'My heart warks for thee, lad, wi' wife an' bairns pining, an' Holroyd, who's nobbut a warking-man hissen, stinkin' wi' brass.'

Here Frank uttered a vehement curse.

'Nay, cursing's nowt, it isn't. Aw knaw summat better nor that.'

As Frank did not rise to this fly—for he hadn't taken in what was said—Waud added, 'Them machines mun be 'livered[1] i' November.' (The machines, that is, ordered for France.) 'They'll noan be 'livered i' November, nor i' December nayther.'

'Noa?' cried Frank, stopping suddenly.

'Noa.'

'What dost ta mane, mun?'

'Aw mane to mak' t' mill strike this time, if tha'lt beer a hand, wilt ta?' As Frank stood still staring at him in silent perplexity, Waud went on, 'Aw mane to taich Holroyd we're noan t' muck on t' roäd to be trodden dahn under his fooit. He's bahn "to drive us aat o' t' place, or into t' Bastile," is he? Happen he'll be driven aat o' t' place hissen.

1 ''Livered,' *i.e.* delivered.

Awm noan bahn to be pined to deeath, abaht[1] hittin' aat at him, aw amn't.'

'What canst ta doa? Nay, it's all nowt.'

'Aw can mak' t' mill strike, aw tell thee, if tha'lt nobbut beer a hand wi' t' job. It's thee an' me Holroyd's agin, tha knaws; an' we mun be even wi' him afore we're shut in t' Bastile.'

Here Frank seized suddenly the little man by both shoulders, holding him with the grip of a vice, and cried hoarsely, with a fierce fire in his eye, 'Spak' aat, mun!'

'Wi' Holroyd's spies abaat? Nay, tha mun coome to my haase, an' aw'll shaw thee theer summat that'll doa t' job.'

As Frank walked unsteadily by his side, Waud fanned the fire of his fury by insisting that he was now, through Holroyd's means, a marked man in Milbank—that he could not henceforth get any work of any kind—not that even of a labourer—in the place—that if he was a man he ought to have the spirit to resent and the courage to revenge such per-

[1] 'Abaht,' *i.e.* without.

secution, and that because he (Waud) knew him to be a man, he had chosen him for the work in hand.

It came out later, however, that he had another and stronger reason for his choice of Frank. He meant to blow up Holroyd's factory, or at least wreck its engine-house and engine with dynamite, and he thought Frank could devise and construct secretly at his own lathe a clockwork apparatus that would time the explosion to take place when both could prove that they were seeking work at Leeds at the moment of its occurrence. He did not know that Frank had had to part with his lathe and his tools, nor did he, either, calculate upon the frenzying effect of his inflammatory talk upon Frank's tipsy fury.

As the clockwork apparatus was an afterthought of faintheartedness, he had already fitted a fulminating fuse to his canister of dynamite. When this was explained to Frank nothing could restrain him from attempting the enterprise forthwith. The man at the

moment was little better than a madman. He had brooded over his wrongs till he had become dangerous even in his sober moments; but now, on fire with drink and with Waud's infuriating speeches, he became ungovernable. Waud greatly regretted his rashness in choosing such an ally—at least in such a moment. Frank while in the parlour of the 'Pat and Hammer,' seemed 'nobbut a bit fresh'; but the open air and Waud's talk combined appeared to excite him to a wild pitch of intoxication.

'Gie it me!' he cried.

'Nay, lad, not to-neet,' Waud replied in dismay at the incontrollable spirit he had roused.

'Ay, to-neet, aw tell thee.'

'Weel, bide a bit; till it's lat'. The public haases are noan loosed yet, mun,' Waud urged remonstrantly and soothingly. But Frank paid no heed to him. Pushing him roughly aside, he seized the canister and staggered with it from the house crying:

'Aw'll blaw the —— place to ——.'

Waud hurried after him in despair. He

thought that Frank to a certainty would be detected and arrested, and would incriminate him. He would not have a chance with so powerful a man if he attempted to wrest from him the canister—not in itself a very safe operation. He must follow Frank, and if he saw him stopped and questioned by the police, hurry up, and, in the last resort, denounce him as a dynamitard.

But Frank in his present state was just the man for the business in hand. If he had slouched along in the shadow and by unfrequented byways—stopping now and again to look furtively round—he might have been suspected and arrested. No one, however, would suspect for a moment a man who strode on defiantly, however unsteadily, in the very middle of the high road. This Waud soon perceived, and his next fear was lest Frank might be caught in the midst of a bungling attempt to light the fuse. The man seemed hardly sane enough to choose a secret place and an unobserved moment to set down and fire the charge. Nay, it was as likely as

not that he would himself be blown to pieces through his insane recklessness. Mr. Waud did not think this possibility by any means the most deplorable of those his fears pictured to him.

Of the few they met no one took the least notice of Frank or his burden, which, having been painted black, was not noticeable. When they reached the street in which the factory stood and found it still and empty Waud began to take heart. This little street, which ran along the east side of the factory, was frequented and bustling only when the hands thronged it on their way to and from their work. There were no shops in it, and few houses, and none of any pretension. On the factory side of it there were few houses at all, and these all to the south of the building. On the north stretched away abruptly from the foot of the engine-house wall a frousy waste, which seemed to be the cemetery of dead dogs, cats, old kettles, broken china, and broken-up machinery. It was to be let for building, and would probably be

taken for it when it had become sufficiently saturated with filth. Along the edge of this waste ran the engine-house and a long low shed of machinery, flanked at the far end by the factory chimney.

When Waud had followed Frank into the street, and was reassured by its emptiness and stillness, his next anxiety was lest Frank in his drunken recklessness should plop the canister down the moment he reached the factory—at the south end, that is, or at some point along its street front; where an explosion would probably wreck more ruinously the unsubstantial cottages on the opposite side of the narrow street than the solid walls of the factory. But Frank had got it well into his muddled head that he must strike the heart of the factory—the engine-house—as its vital spot. When he turned into the street he kept still the middle of the roadway until he reached the north end of the factory, when he made across the waste for the engine-house. Waud, following him more closely now, saw him, through the

dimness, set the canister down against the engine-house wall and then straighten himself to look about him in perplexity. The fact was that, not being a smoker, Frank had not a match. He stumbled back across the waste until he saw Waud: 'A leet!' he cried hoarsely.

Waud, looking this way and that without seeing a soul or hearing a sound, thought that after all there could hardly be a better opportunity. Anyhow Frank in this mood was dangerous to parley with. Handing him a box of fusees he said in a gruff whisper, 'Tha mun run for thee life, lad.'

When Frank had snatched the box from him impatiently, Waud took his own advice and sped with the speed of a hart to a public-house in the neighbourhood which he sometimes frequented. When he had reached it he stole in unnoticed, and joined at once with his usual readiness in the conversation, as though he had been listening to it for some time. Yet, while he spoke glibly to the point, his heart seemed to stop

beating that he might the better hear the explosion.

Meanwhile Frank had stumbled back across the sudden hills and hollows and litter of the waste to the canister. Kneeling down he felt about for the fuse, which he found after some tipsy fumbling, and kindled after two failures to light it. He then rose and hurried away, holding by the wall of the factory to steady himself.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXPLOSION.

WAUD, knowing Frank's weaknesses, had spoken to him again and again of Holroyd's evident intention to crush him, Frank, specially and utterly. Else, why should far the cleverest mechanic in Milbank be turned away from every shop in the place? This, we know, was Frank's own conviction, which needed no confirmation to his mind from any one; though Waud's harping upon it had its intended effect of exasperation. Nevertheless it was a complete delusion of self-importance. Mr. Holroyd had no special grudge against Frank, and had issued no special caution against him to other masters. Nor, again, had these other masters the opinion of Frank's merits which he had of them himself; for

they knew nothing whatever about him. Frank did not get in at the other shops, in part because the labour market was glutted,—as the instant failure of the strike showed,—and in part because he applied for work as though he was offering, and not asking, a favour.

Rowan, therefore, in pleading for Frank to Mr. Holroyd, had no special grudge to get over. Nay, he had no grudge whatever to get over; for, when Rowan, having laid the main stress of his pleading upon Frank's skill and inventiveness, went on to say incidentally that he had been strongly opposed to the strike, Mr. Holroyd fastened at once upon this as alone of importance. Now, Rowan, as we have said in a former chapter, had not at all thought this the strongest part of his case, therefore he brought it in as an *obiter dictum*—the most effective way of introducing it, as it happened. If he had laid the principal stress upon it Mr. Holroyd would probably have suspected him of overcolouring Frank's opposition to the strike. As it was, however, he gathered his know-

ledge of Frank's fidelity to him chiefly from Rowan's answers to his questions—the most ingenuous and convincing way of deriving it.

'Why didn't you tell me this before?' he asked with an interest and an eagerness that surprised Rowan.

'I didn't know before that he was out of work. In fact, I forgot him altogether till to-night.'

After a moment's pause Mr. Holroyd said, 'If he's half as clever as you say, I'll make his fortune.'

Here was a surprising promise from a man who meant mostly rather more than less than he said; but Mr. Holroyd's appreciation of Frank's faithfulness was proportionate to his disgust with the ingratitude and treachery of his fellow-workmen.

'I shall send for him to-morrow and see him myself.'

'I promised to call on the way home to let them know if you'd take him back.'

'Well; tell him to come see me after breakfast to-morrow.'

'He's not much to look at now, he's so broken down; and, besides, I ought to tell you, he's an uncommonly good opinion of himself.'

'Pooh! He's none the worse for that. So have I; and I shouldn't have got to be where I am if I hadn't had an uncommonly good opinion of myself. If you don't believe in yourself, how can you expect other folk to believe in you? You can't expect a man to offer more than you ask yourself for your goods, eh? As he's a deal more likely to beat your price down a bit, it's best to put a bit on. Not going?

'Yes, I promised——'

'You're a deal too soft-hearted, Rowan. *That* doesn't get a man on, I can tell you. A man might almost as well have a soft head as a soft heart, so far as getting on is concerned. However, I'm glad you mentioned Fearnside's case, and you may tell him from me that he'll be none the worse for having been true to his salt. Good-night.'

Thus it happened that at the very moment when Frank flung out of the 'Pat and Hammer' in a frenzy of fury with Holroyd for his special and unrelenting persecution of him, Rowan hurried away from Bessemer Hall to make him and Nancy happy with Mr. Holroyd's message of good-will. He found Nancy sitting by the cold hearth mending her children's things by the light of a paraffine lamp, screwed down almost to extinction—like the wan light of her own life. At Rowan's entry she turned up the lamp as she rose, and looked with hungry hope in her haggard face into his.

'It's all right, Nancy,' he cried joyously. 'Mr. Holroyd was so much pleased to hear that Frank was against the strike that he says he'll be the making of him. He is to go see him after breakfast to-morrow.'

Nancy, on hearing the great news, sat suddenly down, looking up with wide eyes and parted lips trying to take it in. Joy had been so great a stranger to her of late that she was slow to recognise its face. When she

did recognise it at last, of course, she cried—silently, in the 'sacred silence that is flood-gate of the deeper heart.'

Rowan, to relieve her at least of so much of her burden as was made up of gratitude to him, explained that he had no difficulty whatever about the matter; for the moment Mr. Holroyd heard of Frank's opposition to the strike he was as eager as Rowan himself to have him back. But Nancy was not to be in this way disburdened of her gratitude, whose expression gave her a far greater relief than that of tears. But she expressed it in a singular manner. The usual West Riding formula for its expression (which is not, when looked into, a gracious one), 'Aw s'all neer be aat o' thee debt,' did not seem to her adequate. She used it, but she reinforced it in this eloquent way, 'Tha mun see 'em, Mr. Rowan,' she said, taking up the light and leading the way into the other room. When Rowan had followed, she held the light so that it would fall upon the faces of the two children, which even sleep could not make

rosy. The elder one especially looked pinched and weasand.

'Eh, my puir bairns!' she cried, stooping to kiss each in turn. Her kiss, or her fast falling tears, woke the elder, who began to cry with a look of terror in his face. 'Hush, doee,[1] hush! It's noan thee feyther,' the poor mother was surprised into saying, thereby revealing to Rowan her worst trouble of all. That Frank, whose home-coming a short time since had been the golden moment of his children's day, should now in his drunken madness be a terror to them, was the most piteous of all the piteous changes a couple of months had wrought in the wrecked household.

Poor Nancy, on perceiving how she had committed herself, hastened to say, 'He coomes hoam at times a bit fresh, does Frank, an' t' bairns are noan used to see it, tha knaws. But that's ovver nah, Mr. Rowan; it's ovver nah,' she sobbed again.

It occurred then to Rowan that Frank

[1] 'Doee,' *i.e.* darling.

might return now at any moment in this state, and that therefore the sooner he got out of his way the better. It would be a deep pain to Nancy, and a remorse to-morrow to Frank, if he was surprised by Rowan on such an occasion in such a condition. Wherefore Rowan said, 'Well, Nancy, I must get home. You will explain to Frank that Mr. Holroyd has the very kindliest feelings towards him, and means to advance him in every way he can. Don't forget, too, that he's to call at the office to-morrow morning, immediately after breakfast. Good-night, Nancy.'

'Gooid-neet, Mr. Rowan, gooid-neet, sir,' Nancy said, holding his hand in both of hers; and then she added, while struggling with her tears, 'Nay, aw can say nowt, aw can't.'

'Pooh! there's nothing to say; there isn't, indeed. Good-night.'

Rowan's direct road home would take him past the 'Pat and Hammer'; but, as he thought it as well not to risk even a casual meeting on the high-road with Frank, he

took a slightly devious route which brought him face to face with the man he was seeking to avoid. For it took him along the skirts of the waste at the moment that Frank was firing the fuse. When Frank, having fired it, had groped his way along the engine-house wall to the footpath, he found himself face to face with Rowan. 'Frank!' exclaimed Rowan, but Frank turned sharply away and ran as for life. Rowan at once glanced in the direction from which Frank had come, and saw the lighted fuse. He understood what it meant in a moment. At the same moment Frank, suddenly sobered, stopped, turned round, and shouted frantically, 'Get aat o' gate! Get aat o' gate!' But Rowan had rushed across the waste, seized the canister, and hurled it as far as he could from the factory. It was not very far, as it was a good weight. It exploded as it touched the earth, and the explosion flung to the ground both Rowan and Frank (who had hurried back to save him)—Rowan with great violence. Frank, who was unhurt, was up

in a moment; he ran across to Rowan, who appeared to him to be quite dead. As he bent in horror over the senseless body, he was harrowed with remorse, but with a remorse that was absolutely unselfish. He thought only of the man whom he had, as he imagined, murdered, and not at all of the consequences of his murder to himself. All the numberless kindnesses Rowan had shown his children started up together before his mind. Of Rowan's extreme cordiality to himself he did not think, for he was much too conceited to consider that the balance of benefit from their intimacy was on his side. But he was overwhelmed with remorse for the murder of a man who had shown such kindness to his children.

Before he could recover himself so far as to kneel down in order to ascertain if Rowan was really dead, he was surrounded by a crowd from the neighbouring houses and public houses, which the tremendous explosion had shaken or shattered. In the van of this crowd was Waud. Seeing Frank bending

over the victim of the explosion, he concluded that his accomplice had been so sobered by the shock as to perceive that he could best escape suspicion by remaining on the spot. Thus even his footmarks would be accounted for.

'What's up, mate?' Waud asked in a casual way.

'He's deead,' replied Frank, forgetting for the moment everything else.

'Nay; nowt o' sowrt. He's nobbut stunned a bit, aw reckon. Some on ye fetch a shutter. We mun tak' him to t' hospital.'

'Aw shaated to him to get aat o' gate,' Frank said, rather to his own conscience than to Waud. Then Waud began to fear, more from Frank's distraught manner than from his words, that he was still tipsy. Before, however, he could say anything to caution him, a policeman, who had overheard Frank's statement, said, as he put his hand upon his shoulder, 'You saw it, my man.'

'Ay.'

'What did you see?

Here Waud, who had got himself by this well out of sight in the body of the crowd, shouted, 'Tak' his address, an' looik after t' maimed man, mun.' For he did not think Frank in a fit state yet for cross-examination.

His advice, which was sensible enough, was more likely to have been resented than regarded; for a policeman, like a hospital doctor, is more concerned to master the enemy in a difficult case than to relieve the sufferings of the victim. At this point, however, some one on the outskirts of the crowd, seeing something ablaze where the explosion had taken place, shouted, 'There's another on 'em aleet!'

Hereupon there was a general stampede of the crowd, including the policeman, but not Frank. Waud, affecting to share the panic, gave back with the rest till he reached the opposite side of the street, when he said, 'Nay, it's all nowt; we munnot let t' man dee.' So saying, he hurried back to Frank with the double object of cautioning and of screening him, since his taking no notice of

the alarm looked as if he knew there was no foundation for it. When he reached Frank he caught and shook him by the arm. 'Art ta i' t' mind to be hanged, mun? Say tha seed a leet, an' thowt theer wor summat up, an' shaated to him to keep aat o' gate.'

Frank shook him roughly off with a bitter curse, and before Waud could say more they were joined by some of the bolder spirits of the crowd bearing a shutter, and by three constables of police and a sergeant.

'He seen it,' said the policeman, who had already begun to question Frank, addressing the sergeant.

'What did you see, my man?' asked the sergeant, addressing Frank; but, before the latter could reply, the sergeant had turned to give directions to those who were lifting Rowan on to the shutter. 'Gently there, gently. Now, all together—steady!' When the men, having got the shutter with its burden on to their shoulders, started to move cautiously across the rough ground of the waste, the sergeant turned again to Frank.

'How was it? What did you see?' In this short interval Frank had time to think over the peril of his own position, and of Waud's suggestion for escape from it. As nothing more plausible occurred to him, he repeated the precise words which were yet in his ears. 'Aw seed a leet, an' thowt theer wor summat up, an' aw shaated to him to keep aat o' gate.'

'But he didn't?'

'Nay, he mun ha' thowt hissen theer wor summat wrang; for he runned ovver an' tooik up t' canister, an' flang it as fur as he could from t' mill.'

'A canister? You could see it was a canister?'

'Ay,' Frank answered, with a sudden gruff reserve.

'From the road?'

There was a hardly appreciable pause before Frank replied, 'Nay; aw'd been ovver mysen to see what it wor.'

'And you thought it was an infernal machine?'

'Ay.'

'Why didn't you fling it away from the factory?'

'Aw wor flayed.'[1]

'Aw'd ha' been flayed to mell on it, mysen,' Waud said to give Frank what support he could. But the sergeant honoured the interruption only by a contemptuous glance at the speaker, and proceeded with his examination, which he held as they walked together towards the hospital.

'Did you see them that put it there?'

'Nay.'

'You met or saw no one near the place?'

'Nobbut him.'

'In what direction were you going?'

'I wor bahn hoam to Tetley Street.'

'To Tetley Street? Then you had your back turned to it?'

'He heeard it spit, like a cat, he said,' Waud remarked, not to the sergeant, but to one of the men near him in a tone just audible to Frank, but inaudible to the sergeant who walked at Frank's other side.

[1] 'Flayed,' *i.e.* frightened.

'Aw heeard summat hiss, like,' said Frank, speaking upon this hint; 'an' aw looiked raand to see what it wor, an' aw seed t' fuse afire.'

'But you heard no one making off?'

'Nay, aw heeard nowt nobbut t' fuse.'

The sergeant then questioned him as to the size, appearance, etc., of the canister; as to the position in which it was placed; and as to the position in which he stood at the moment of the explosion. When Frank, in answer to the last question, had explained that he had hurried back to save Rowan, and was himself knocked down by the explosion, the sergeant, glancing at his clothes under the light of a street lamp, perceived that they were plastered down the back with mud.

By this time they had reached the hospital, and the sergeant, having taken down Frank's name and address, dismissed him with the words, 'We shall want you again, my man.'

As Frank seemed inclined to remain with the crowd that hung about the gates of the

hospital, Waud made a sign to him to follow him, and then, when this was disregarded, he asked him in a marked way, 'Bahn hoam, lad?'

When Frank roughly answered, 'Nay, Waud added still more significantly, 'We goa together, tha knaws.'

As Frank for answer merely turned his back upon him, Waud himself was forced to remain among the crowd. He must have a private talk with Frank, for he was in an agony of anxiety to know what Rowan had seen of the affair, and to shape and prompt Frank's evidence accordingly.

Frank also was in an agony of anxiety. Was Rowan killed—murdered—as he put it to himself? As he had now thoroughly realised his own peril, his remorse and wretchedness were torturing. The sergeant's twenty minutes' absence seemed to him days, and when that important personage at last appeared and proceeded to bully his way through the crowd, Frank did not, for he could not, ask the question whose answer meant so much to him.

'Ax him,' he whispered hoarsely to Waud, nudging him with his elbow. But as he spoke a dozen voices asked, 'He's noan deead?'

'No,' replied the sergeant curtly.

'Is he bahn to dee, sargeant?' asked Waud in a conciliatory tone.

Then the sergeant thought it best upon the petulant principle of the Unjust Judge in the Parable to escape further badgering by a precise announcement of the state of the case.

'He's not dead, and he'll not die, but he's badly hurt. He's had concussion of the brain, and his right arm is broken.'

Having announced this, as though passing it as a sentence from the Bench of Providence, the sergeant added peremptorily, 'Come; that'll do now; get home.'

Upon this the crowd dispersed, all but two or three who still stared wistfully at the lighted windows of the hospital, as though they expected Rowan to appear and address them. Waud did not join Frank immediately

upon his moving off, not until he could do it unobserved. Then he overtook him and asked, 'Did he knaw thee?'

Frank, now relieved of some of his anxiety, and glad of any one to confide in, and advise with, answered, 'Ay, he spak' to me.'

'He seen thee leet it!' exclaimed Waud aghast.

'Nay, aw jumped[1] him at t' causeway an' he cried aat "Frank," an' aw run abaht[2] spak'in' for a step or two, and then aw turned raand an' shaated to him to get aat o' gate; but he neer heeded me, an' aw run back an' seen him thraw it; an' then aw knawed nowt till aw fun' mysen on my back on t' roäd. Eh! awm fain he's noan killed.'

'It's a waur[3] job as it is, aw reckon,' Waud, after a pause, remarked grimly. 'Deead men tell no tales. If tha runned when he spak' to thee, he'd knaw weel eneu' what to think, an' they'll get it aat on him

[1] 'Jumped,' *i.e.* came upon. [2] 'Abaht,' *i.e.* without.
[3] 'Waur,' *i.e.* worse.

when he mends. Awm dahn on t' job, aw am.'

Frank was silent through his wretched conviction that this was nearly certain. But after two minutes' more thought Waud suggested more hopefully:

'Still there's nobbut his suspicion agin thee, if he noan see thee set it aleet; an' tha mud ha' been in too big a hurry thysen to get aat o' gate o' t' blaw up to spak' when he spak' to thee. It's noan like aither tha'd run back to keep t' breeath in a man whose ward 'ud hang thee. Nay, aw think tha'lt pull it off, if tha'll nobbut stick to tale tha telled yon sargeant.'

There was a good deal in this, and Frank went home with some hope in his heart of getting out of his frightful scrape. As he neared his door he decided to give Nancy the account of the incident he had given the sergeant. He could not bring himself to tell her the truth, not for her sake only, but for his own.

Nancy, who had heard the explosion itself,

but had heard only that moment from a judicious neighbour of Frank's having been in some way mixed up with it, was rushing frantically from the house to seek him when he met her and told her his story.

'Eh! Mr. Rowan!' was the only comment she could make for a little time in her deep trouble at the news. At last she was able to tell Frank of Rowan's good offices, and of Mr. Holroyd's good intentions. 'An' we thowt them agin us!' she said. Frank listened in perfect silence, and remained still silent for long after she had finished, gazing blankly into the empty grate. Then he only echoed her words with a biting bitterness which she could not understand, 'Ay, lass, we thowt them both agin us!'





CHAPTER IX.

'VISITATION OF THE SICK.'

ROWAN, having been at once recognised by the house-surgeon as a constant visitor of the hospital patients in his ministerial days, was allotted a private room. Here, having been undressed and carefully examined, he was pronounced to be suffering from concussion of the brain and a fractured arm. He remained for some time motionless, unconscious, partly insensible. When roused and questioned he answered hastily, only to relapse again into apparent insensibility. When at last consciousness began slowly to return, he first moved uneasily, as though waking from a sleep, then opened his eyes, only to close them again, for even the dim light of the darkened room was insupportable to him,

while the slightest sound seemed to tear his brain open. Even when with the morning he came more to himself, and could recognise the house-surgeon, and realise where he was, he could not recall what had brought him there. Not only could he remember nothing of the accident, but he could remember nothing that had happened between his bidding Nancy 'good-night' and the doctor's bidding him 'good-morning.' It is curious how a shock of this kind acts retrospectively upon the brain to blot out from it at first what immediately preceded the accident, as completely as what immediately succeeded it.

Thus it happened that it was not until Rowan had heard from the house-surgeon the sergeant's account — Frank's account, that is — of the affair, that he could recall his own part in it. Not even then could he recall it clearly, or at first so focus his mind upon any one point as to ask questions about it. That he should himself be questioned about it by the police authorities while in

this state was not to be thought of, said the doctors, since any such examination would be dangerous to him and worthless to them. It was not until the third day after the explosion that the doctors would allow the examination to be made, and by this time Rowan had got well into his mind Frank's version of the affair, confirmed by the fact of Frank's having himself been knocked down by the explosion on his hurrying back to save Rowan.

For all this Rowan could not help a suspicion that Frank had to do with the outrage. If fear made him turn away so sharply, and run when Rowan called out 'Frank,' why should he return the next moment into danger? Or, if his anxiety for Rowan's safety was so great as to overcome his fear, why did not he express it at the moment of their meeting? A man in a panic is most likely to cry out in the first moments of his alarm. Thinking all this, and thinking also of the dangerous and desperate temper into which Frank had worked

himself, Rowan could not help a suspicion that he had had a hand in the outrage.

Nevertheless, even if his suspicion had had a great deal more to go upon, Rowan, with Nancy and her children in his mind, and in his mind also Frank's attempt to save him at the risk of his own life, was not likely to set the police on Frank's track. After all, he considered, that as whatever harm was done had been done to himself, he might pardonably shield the offender—if he was the offender.

Wherefore in his account to the police he said merely that he had come upon Frank at the moment that the latter was hurrying away from the infernal machine, and that Frank had stopped, after running a few steps, to shout to him to keep clear. He said nothing of addressing Frank, or of Frank's behaviour when so addressed.

It was rather a pity that he did not, if it would have been the very least relief to his conscience, for this additional evidence would have had no weight with the police. They

had got an idea of their own on the subject to which they were wedded—and no old woman wedded to a young husband is so jealous as 'the force,' when it has got an idea of its own.

The outrage was un-English; was either Irish or American-Irish. There were no American-Irish in Milbank, therefore it was Irish. Fearnside was not Irish, and consequently could have had nothing to do with it. For the same reason all the English hands who struck were eliminated from the police calculations, and only the handful of Irish strikers remained to be sifted.

In sifting them the police had the help of the inevitable 'clue.' As the dynamitard could not—after having lit the fuse—have fled up the street, since Frank had not seen him, nor down the street, since Rowan had not seen him, he must have retreated across the waste ground. Across the waste ground, from the very spot where the canister was deposited to the road on the farther side, were found footmarks which promised to

be as certain a test as that in *Cinderella*, and for the same reason—the singularity of the size of the foot that made them. It seemed scarcely possible that there could be more than one foot (or two feet) of that size in Milbank. So incredible seemed its enormous length and breadth, that the head constable sent to have its dimensions verified before he would allow the measurements to be advertised side by side with the reward for the discovery of the criminal. However, they were found unfortunately to be absolutely accurate. Unfortunately, we say, because then the two sets of police calculations were found not 'to prove'—to speak arithmetically. No Irishman could be found in Milbank, nor in any of the neighbouring towns, with a foot of this precise size.

A great London detective named Pratt was sent for to unravel the mystery, and was shown over the ground by police-constable Pickles—the first of the force on the spot on the night of the explosion. Pratt examined carefully the unobliterated footmarks, asked

Pickles a few questions, and came then to a rapid and unexpected conclusion.

'I think,' he said to Mr. Holroyd, who accompanied him, 'I've got to the bottom of this affair of the footmarks, sir.'

'You have!' exclaimed Mr. Holroyd, amazed by his swift solution of the mystery.

'Well, I think so. You suppose them to have been made by the criminal, sir?'

'Ay,' interrupted Constable Pickles, who was affronted at once at their clue being discredited, and by himself being ignored. 'Ay, that's what we think. We knaw nowt what folks up in London may think—except that they think theirselves un—common sharp—but that's abaat what we think, and what we knaw.'

'Oh, you know?' retorted Pratt, turning sharply upon Pickles, somewhat to his discomfiture. 'You know that the man who made them footmarks is the man? Then I've got him.'

'You've got him!' exclaimed the bewildered Pickles. 'Where?'

'Here!' putting his hand on Pickles' shoulder. 'They're your own footmarks, man.' As indeed they were. When the alarm of a probable second explosion was given, Pickles had fled across the waste, while the rest of the crowd had fallen back to the street; and Pratt, while examining the old footmarks, could not help seeing that they were of the precise dimensions of the fresh ones side by side with them made by his guide.

The exposure of this mare's nest covered the local police with such ridicule that they lost all heart, and their investigation into the matter dragged, languished, and very shortly died; only, however, to be revived later on, as we shall see.

But to return to Rowan. His thoughts, when he was able to think, were not, we need hardly say, all of anxiety about Frank, Nancy, and their children. He was extremely anxious about Lucy—about the shock to her of coming upon an abrupt and exaggerated account of his accident in the

newspapers. Yet how was he to prevent it? Lucy had insisted on his keeping secret from every one, even from her sister, their engagement and correspondence. Accordingly, he had to keep up a front of dissimulation towards Mary—the last person towards whom he cared to act a disingenuous part. When she happened to meet him she invariably gave him news of Lucy, which he had to receive as news, though generally he knew all she knew before she did. He thus led her to conclude, and she did conclude, that there could be no engagement, as there was no correspondence between them. Now, however, when his brain was unable to think out coherently the simplest letter, and his hand was disabled from writing a word, he must take Mary into confidence, if he was to get her help—the only help available.

But how was he to get it? Mary was a constant visitor to the children's ward of the hospital, and might happen to visit it to-day; but what intelligible message could he send her, or what entreaty, however urgent, would

induce her to come for a moment to his bedside?

Of course Rowan did not think all this out at once, or coherently, but incoherently, and bit by bit, with the result of making himself so very much worse than the doctors expected that they postponed, as we have said, the police examination. At last he ceased to think about it, for he ceased to be able to think about anything. However, he surprised the nurse by a sudden interest in some exquisite flowers she had just set by him.

'Who?' he asked laconically, in his mental feebleness.

The nurse shook her head. 'The children's ward nurse brought them, sir,' she said.

Presently, as if after a great effort to concentrate his thoughts, he asked, 'Miss Lisle?'

Again the nurse shook her head. 'I don't know who brought them, sir.'

Then he said, this time after a shorter interval, 'Tell Miss Lisle I want to see

her—one moment—to see her,' bending his head feebly.

The nurse, who was long skilled in the interpretation of every mood and movement of a patient, perceived that he had this very much at heart. However, she hesitated, as her orders to allow no one to see him were strict. When he said again irritably, 'Miss Lisle,' as though the nurse had not understood him, she considered that he would be much more injuriously excited by her crossing than by her humouring his wish. Besides, to exclude those who wished to see him was one thing, to exclude any one whom he wished to see was another. Wherefore she said, 'I'll see, sir.'

As she reached the door of the children's ward, which was on the next storey above, she met Mary just issuing from it.

'Please, Miss Lisle, Mr. Rowan wants to see you.'

'To see me!' cried Mary, taken much aback.

'Just for one minute, miss.' As Mary

hesitated, much to the surprise of the nurse, who saw nothing odd in the request, she added, 'He seems to have something on his mind to say to you, miss.'

Since this sounded to Mary as if Rowan were dying, she asked tremulously, with paling cheek, 'Is he—is he very ill?'

'He's ill enough, miss,' replied the nurse, who looked more grave even than her words, with the view of overcoming the young lady's over-nice reluctance to see her patient for a moment.

Mary hesitated no longer. She said nothing, but followed the nurse downstairs and along the corridor of the next storey till they reached Rowan's room. The nurse turned gently the handle and entered the darkened room, Mary following her with ashy cheek and quick-beating heart. The nurse had given her the impression that Rowan was either dying or in great danger, and the shocking news revealed her own heart to herself. Surely for no mere or near friend's danger could she have felt an anxiety

and a wretchedness so poignant as those that wrung her heart now? Nor was she reassured about him, when, as she entered, she met his large wide eyes (from which his face somehow seemed to have shrunk away) fixed upon her with an unnatural brightness.

As she approached his bed he smiled and nodded feebly and said, 'Thank you.' Then, after a pause, he said, 'Your sister — will you write and tell her it's nothing? Only my arm that's hurt—can't write with it. It's nothing. The papers may frighten her. You will write to say it's nothing?' Mary nodded, and his eager look was changed to one of exceeding relief. Then turning his head on the pillow towards the flowers he said, 'You?' Again Mary nodded, and he returned her nod feebly in acknowledgment and smiled. As he looked up into her face its pallor and expression of pity and sorrow seemed suddenly to strike him.

'It's only a shake, and my arm,' he said, glancing down at his broken arm. 'I shall be all right soon. You will tell her?'

'Yes; I shall write to her at once,' Mary replied in a voice that trembled in spite of herself.

Up to this the nurse had kept at a discreet distance, busying herself about something at the far end of the room; but now, on hearing along the corridor a man's footstep, which she took for the doctor's, she came forward to say, 'I'm not to let him talk too much, miss.'

Taking the hint Mary said 'Good-bye.'

Glancing again at the flowers he said, 'Thank you—good-bye,' with a pleasant smile.

At the door of his room, as she left it, Mary came face to face with Mr. Holroyd. She blushed up to the roots of the hair with the consciousness of the construction Mr. Holroyd would put upon her visit—a blush which but confirmed that construction.

'How is he, Miss Lisle?' he asked anxiously.

'He seems very ill,' she answered gravely.

'He's a noble fellow,' he exclaimed enthu-

siastically in his gratitude for Rowan's risking his life to save the factory. But he could not help adding rather pompously, 'I shall make a man of him,'—endow him, that is, with the crowning grace of manhood,—riches.

'Stay, nurse, I'm going in,' he added, as the nurse, on perceiving that it was not the doctor, was closing gently the door behind Mary.

'I'm not allowed to let any one see him, sir.'

'Except Miss Lisle, eh?' he replied, glancing archly at Mary. 'Well, I can't say that I've as much right as she has, nurse, so I shall not disturb him. He's doing well, I hope?'

'Very fairly, sir.'

'That's right. Tell him I called to inquire and to thank him.'

Then Mr. Holroyd returned along the corridor talking noisily of this diabolical outrage, and of Rowan's heroism, to Mary, who was trying the while to think how she could disabuse him of his idea of her relations to his hero. As, however, it was impossible for her

to explain Rowan's object in asking to see her, she was held silent. At the bottom of the stairs they encountered the house-surgeon, of whom Mr. Holroyd made inquiries about the patient.

'I've just been up to see Rowan, doctor; but that dragon of a nurse of yours allows no one to come near him but his nearest and dearest,' he said, with a painfully jocose glance at Mary. 'How's he doing, eh?'

'Oh, he'll do; but every hour of quiet now means a day at the other end. A stitch in time, you know.'

'He's not in any danger?'

'Oh, dear no,' replied carelessly the house-surgeon—a self-confident and sanguine youth, who always backed himself at long odds against death. 'We'll pull him through safe enough. He got the deuce and all of a knock, though.'

'He'll be all right when he is right, I hope?' asked Mr. Holroyd anxiously, for he feared Rowan's brain might have been permanently affected by such a shock.

'Right enough. We'll mend him up as good as new, you'll see; but it will take a bit of time. Good-morning.'

Mary felt almost angry with herself for the greatness of her relief at this news, when Mr. Holroyd said to her soothingly, as they issued together from the hospital, 'There's nothing much to worry yourself about, you see, Miss Lisle.'

Mary found it impossible now not to give some explanation. 'I understood from the nurse that Mr. Rowan was very ill—dying, I thought; and that he wished to see me about something of great importance. It was a letter he wished me to write for him.'

'For sure, for sure,' replied Mr. Holroyd, nodding an exasperating approval, and intimating that it was the most natural thing in the world for Rowan to choose Mary as his amanuensis. Before Mary could, if she would, have said anything more, they met at the gate of the hospital our millennial little friend, Miss Ripple, who was bustling in to

make the most of this providential affliction of Rowan's.

'How is he? Have you seen him?' she asked Mr. Holroyd breathlessly.

'Rowan? I haven't seen him, but Miss Lisle has just been with him, and the doctor tells us he's doing well,' Mr. Holroyd replied, without, of course, any mischief-making intention. He never went so far outside himself as to consult or consider other people's feelings with either good or ill intent. Now Miss Ripple, as we know, had her own reasons for suspecting an attachment between Mary and Mr. Rowan—a suspicion which Mr. Holroyd's surprising announcement more than confirmed. For if Mary thought her visit to Rowan of doubtful propriety, what would a prudish old maid think of it? She would think it justifiable only (if at all) by the lady's engagement to the gentleman. And when the lady was Mary (of whom Miss Ripple had an extraordinarily high opinion) it was not possible to doubt her engagement to the gentleman.

As Miss Ripple had been busy with her good offices of mediation between Mr. Holroyd and his hands during the strike, with the usual result of exacerbating both the dispute and the dislike to herself of the disputants, Mr. Holroyd retreated in haste from before her, leaving her and Mary together. Then Miss Ripple turned to reveal to Mary what, as one of the Cabinet Council of Heaven, she had learned about the meaning of this stroke.

'You mustn't repine, my dear; it's sent to bring him back into the fold. You'd never have been happy with him if he remained outside; and such unions are wrong, besides.' Then Miss Ripple proceeded to quote, as a case in point, the prohibition in the Levitical law to yoke together in one plough an ox and an ass—for Miss Ripple was given to mystical interpretation of the Scriptures.

This was rather trying it will be admitted.

'What *do* you mean, Miss Ripple?' Mary

asked petulantly. 'Mr. Rowan is nothing to me, nor I to him.'

'But, my dear,' stammered Miss Ripple, amazed and confounded, 'I thought you had been to his ward?'

'He heard I was in the hospital, and he asked to see me to send a message by me that he could send by no one else. I went, of course,' Mary answered rather defiantly.

'It was very brave of you, my dear. I never had the—the courage to visit the men's wards myself,' Miss Ripple said, with a stumble over the word 'courage' to indicate its being a euphemism. 'But I was going to venture this morning,' she added, to keep Mary's blushes in some kind of countenance.

But Mary was not blushing at all. 'Mr. Rowan is not in a ward,' she replied coldly; 'he has a room to himself.'

We are not sure whether this made the bad business better in the eyes of Miss Ripple. Being almost as much of an egotist as Mr. Holroyd, she said meditatively, without a thought at the moment of reflecting

upon Mary, 'In a room by himself! I wonder would it—would he think me odd if I went in to see him?'

'He knows you too well to think you odd,' Mary said in her exasperation. But Miss Ripple had no suspicion of the speech being sarcastic, and as by this she had become sensible of having just suggested implicitly a doubt of the propriety of Mary's visit to Rowan, she said, 'But, my dear, if you went in to see him an old maid like me may.'

'"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," replied Mary.

'My dear!' exclaimed Miss Ripple, a little shocked at what she supposed to be the profane quotation of a line from a hymn.

'It's not from a hymn, or at least,' she said laughing, 'it's only from a Popish hymn, Miss Ripple.'

But Miss Ripple looked somewhat grave, for hymns were hymns, even if they were the composition of the Pope himself.



CHAPTER X.

'YOUR PROMISE IS FINAL AND FOR LIFE, THEN.'

Miss Ripple's maiden doubts as to the propriety of visiting Rowan were at once decided on her being refused admission to his room. Then she discovered and informed the nurse that she had not had the least intention of such an indecorous intrusion. She had called merely to ask how Mr. Rowan was. Indeed, she was a little offended by the nurse's misunderstanding her to wish to see the patient. Thus Miss Ripple made a virtue of necessity—that hard rock out of which has been hewn with pain much of the virtue of the most severely virtuous of old maids.

Now no folk are more conscious than such old maids that, however high they may be put on the shelf, they are not meant to

be put under a bushel there. None knows better than they that—

> 'Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves; for, if our virtues
> Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
> As if we had them not.'

Therefore Miss Ripple shone much before men—was, to say the truth, rather importunate in calling attention to her own brilliancy. Even this instance of her rigorous propriety she needs must mention, incidentally, it is true, yet significantly, with the significance derivable unfortunately from a foil. For after saying to some friend, 'Of course, my dear, I didn't go into his room,' she could not for her life help adding, either then, or a little later in the conversation, 'Miss Lisle had been in to see him.' She did not say it in the least with any mischief-making intent, for she was not thinking at all of Mary, but of her exemplary little self.

Now as every one was speaking of the explosion, and as Miss Ripple spoke to every one, it will be understood that Mary's visit

to the patient became pretty notorious. It was a grateful bit of gossip for many reasons. Even those who otherwise would have thought nothing of it thought much of it when they considered the vicar's relations with Rowan. If Rowan were the monster of vice the vicar vaguely suggested, it was amazing that Mary should be permitted, or should permit herself, to visit his sick-bed. In fact, the only conceivable solution of the difficulty was that arrived at already by both Miss Ripple and Mr. Holroyd—that is, Mary's attachment or engagement to Rowan without the consent, or the knowledge even, of her father. We are giving, of course, only the ladies' view of the affair, for only the ladies were abroad at this busy hour of the day. The only gentlemen not in their offices and counting houses at this time were those clustered upon the steps of the Exchange, and Miss Ripple made it a rule never, if she could possibly help it, to pass the Exchange when its steps were thus manned.

Among the ladies most interested in her

news were two or three, each of whom yearned to be a mother to Mr. Lisle's motherless girls—to the graceless disgust of the orphans themselves. The most yearning of these was a Miss Sprott, the vicar's spiritual maid-of-all-work, who put an untidy hand to every parochial institution, to the exasperation of all her fellow-workers, and most of all of Rowan, when he was one of them. There was no love lost between them indeed, and no one in Milbank did more to spread and envenom the slanders set afloat about him than Miss Sprott.

Miss Sprott, having towards Mary all the feelings of a ready-made mother (which, like a ready-made shoe, differs from the article when made for you in that it rather shows up and rasps than fits your defects), was horrified to hear of her indiscretion. Indeed, she could not believe it. That the girl, knowing what her father thought of Rowan, and what he most certainly was, should go to his bedside in a public hospital, with a hundred eyes upon her and a hundred tongues to talk of it, was

not to be believed. It was probably, therefore, with the view of obtaining an authoritative contradiction of this palpable calumny, that Miss Sprott at once sought the vicar to question him thereabout.

As Miss Sprott echoed all the vicar's views and quoted to himself his sermons, he had the very highest opinion of her judgment. He spoke of her always as 'a most excellent and judicious woman.' Wherefore he did not in the least suspect her of mischief-making when she repeated to him Miss Ripple's report, and asked his authority for contradicting it everywhere. 'Though,' she went on to say, 'it hardly needs contradiction, as no one is likely to believe that Miss Lisle would go to any man's bedside in a public hospital, least of all to the bedside of a man who has behaved as he has behaved.'

Mr. Lisle's countenance darkened as he listened. He did not believe the story. Miss Sprott, of course, merely affected to disbelieve it in order to paint the business in the blackest colours—charitably. But

Mr. Lisle really did disbelieve it, not merely because of his confidence in Mary, but because of his distrust of Miss Ripple. This, he thought, was her woman's revenge for his having turned her out of his house for the insolence of her mode of advocating Rowan's cause.

'That woman,' he said, 'ought to be shut up!'—that is, in Broadmoor, as a criminal lunatic, for Mr. Lisle never made use of slang.

'I can't imagine her inventing the entire story,' replied Miss Sprott, to put the vicar on the right tack.

'Did you hear it from herself directly?'

'Yes, not ten minutes since. She's been all round the town with it.'

'It's monstrous!' And it may be inferred from his use of such strong language that the vicar was strengthening himself against a misgiving that Miss Ripple would hardly circulate so extensively a story entirely of her own invention.

'That's just what I said to her. I said it

was monstrous; but she turned round upon me and said that Miss Lisle had admitted to herself that she had been into his room.' The vicar remained silent with a growing misgiving of there being some foundation for the scandal. Miss Sprott, noticing the gathering thunder on his brow, continued to charge the cloud:

'I shouldn't have come to trouble you with such a scandalous story if my own contradiction of it was worth anything; but every one said that "of course I thought Miss Lisle could do nothing wrong," and——'

'Have others been speaking of it to you since you saw Miss Ripple?' asked the vicar, sharply interrupting her. As it was 'only ten minutes since she had seen Miss Ripple,' it was strange she should have met and talked with 'every one' in that short interval.

'No, not since I saw her,' stammered Miss Sprott, taken a good deal aback. 'But people always say that I think you and Miss Lisle can do nothing wrong, and they would therefore think little of my contradiction; but if

you will give me your authority to contradict the scandal I may be able to undo much of the mischief.'

'Pooh! the story's not worth noticing,' replied the vicar, with a sudden change of tone, if not of mind, about the matter.

'Not worth noticing!' gasped Miss Sprott.

'Nothing Miss Ripple says is worth noticing or repeating,' the vicar rejoined with some asperity.

'But it will be repeated.'

'By a few old maids,' retorted the vicar scornfully. It had been dawning gradually upon him that this 'most excellent and judicious woman' was making the mischief she professed herself eager to undo. He would probably not have made the discovery if he had not been extremely annoyed.

As there was no possibility of misunderstanding, or affecting to misunderstand, the vicar's rather brutal allusion to scandal-spreading old maids, Miss Sprott rose hastily in great offence, and said, with unexpected spite (for the worm will turn), 'I should

not have come to you to repeat it if I had known it was true.'

The vicar was too much amazed by the revolt of the most abject of his worshippers to reply before she had swept from the room.

This kick of the ass was too much for the sorely-tried lion, whose fury foamed over upon Miss Sprott's departure. He rang the bell and told the servant that he wished to see Miss Lisle if she were at home.

Mary, who had returned home direct from the hospital, was in the middle of her letter to Lucy when her father's message was brought to her. As she was in a nervous and depressed state, and as such a summons to the study was very unusual, she had a misgiving of something being wrong. She locked her half-written letter in her desk and hurried down with a natural presentiment that the subject of which her mind was full at the moment—the relations between Lucy and Mr. Rowan—was that upon which her father wished to question her. It never occurred to her, however, that her father

could have heard of her visit to Mr. Rowan in so short a time. Therefore she was utterly disconcerted when he asked her instantly and sharply upon her entry into the study, 'Have you been to see Mr. Rowan in the hospital?'

'Yes,' she stammered.

Her father, standing opposite to her with his back to the fire and his hands clasped behind him, stared at her in speechless rage for a moment or two before he could say:

'You went in a public hospital to the bedside of a man who disgraced himself and disgraced me in the way that man has done?'

'He heard I was in the hospital, and sent the nurse to ask if I would see him for a moment on a matter of importance. I imagined from what the nurse said that he was not likely to get better.'

'He wished to see you on a matter of importance; may I ask what this matter of importance was?'

'He wished me to—to do something for him,' faltered Mary in so guilty a way that

it was no wonder her father began to take Miss Ripple's and Mr. Holroyd's view of the relations between her and Rowan.

'Wished *you* to do something for him!' he exclaimed.

'Something that only I could do,' Mary explained in still greater confusion.

'Mary, what does this mean?' he demanded furiously.

'Only what I have said,' she answered helplessly.

'*Only* what you have said! Only that you have made yourself the talk of the hospital and a scandal in the town. Do you know what construction every one has put, and must put, on such conduct?'

Mary, now somewhat on her mettle, retorted spiritedly, 'Scandalous people will find a scandal in anything. Under the circumstances I should have done the same thing for any one, or any one else would have done it for him.'

'What circumstances? What circumstances?' he repeated furiously. 'What is

he to you, or you to him, that there should be secrets between you? Under the circumstances of his disgraceful behaviour there ought to have been no communication whatever between you.' He was in such a whirlwind of a temper that Mary's heart again failed her, and she replied, with a relapse into meekness:

'I meant that I thought he was dying.'

'If he was dying, why send for *you?* What had he to tell you that he couldn't tell me, or that you can't tell me now?'—pausing here expectantly for Mary to reveal, if it were revealable, Rowan's request to her. But Mary was dumb; and in her silence and in her white and distressed face her father read confirmation of his suspicion. 'Do you think it right?' he continued, in answer to the refusal expressed by her silence,—'do you think it right to have secrets with any man, and least of all with that man, which you cannot tell your father?' Even in his rage he felt that an appeal of this kind would be the most effective with Mary.

'I have no secrets of my own from you, father,' she said appealingly.

'None that the whole town doesn't know of,' he replied scornfully. For he perversely interpreted her to mean that her relations with Rowan were his secret as well as hers. He would not have suspected her of such disingenuousness a few minutes since. He could not then have missed the true interpretation of Rowan's desire to see her—that he wished to send through her some message to Lucy. But Mary's terror of her father in his fury, and her loyal fear of betraying Lucy and Rowan, gave her all the appearance of detected guilt in her white face, tremulous voice, and agitated manner. Even before her father's summons had startled her, she was, for more than one reason, unnerved, unhappy, and apprehensive. While in this state her father's question, sudden as a pistol shot, 'Have you been to see Mr. Rowan in the hospital?' naturally upset her completely, and each succeeding question and innuendo only plunged her more and more

hopelessly in a confusion that had the face of guilt.

On the other hand her father, before he addressed her at all, was in the mood to put the very worst construction on everything. Wherefore he was little likely to interpret leniently Mary's distress and discomfiture.

As Mary remained hurt and silent after his last speech, he brought the interview to an abrupt close by saying peremptorily, 'Understand clearly that I forbid you visiting the hospital at all at present.'

'Very well,' replied Mary haughtily, and then, fearing to break down, she turned sharply and left the room.

After she had left him the vicar paced up and down the study thinking this thing over. Was it possible that this scoundrel—as he mentally and sincerely stigmatised Rowan—had engaged the affections of *both* his daughters? The more he thought of it, and the calmer he became, the less likely this seemed to him. Surely Mary could

be only the confidante of the lovers? Even this seemed sufficiently abominable; but at least it was not as abominable as her own attachment or engagement to Rowan would have been. He would put the question to her point-blank at lunch, or rather, as he was not going to make the meal unnecessarily uncomfortable, when lunch was over.

Mary, who had meanwhile wept herself into a headache, looked wretched enough to have had murder upon her conscience when she came down to lunch—of which conscience-smitten aspect her father took due note. At the meal she talked little, ate nothing, and rose from the table at the earliest possible moment. As she rose her father asked her in his usual pistol-shot way—the most effective way, as he knew—'Is Mr. Rowan engaged to Lucy?'

'Not that I know of,' Mary stammered, taken completely aback by his abruptness.

'Or to you?'

'Certainly not,' she replied decidedly, and sharply too, for she was angry as well as

hurt by the brusque and almost brutal way in which the question was put.

'If there are secrets between you and him there must be intimacy, when there should have been no communication whatever if you respected yourselves or me—there must be no communication between you in the future. I distinctly forbid it.'

Mary turned proudly away without answering, but was pulled up sharply before she reached the door.

'Mary, do you mean to obey me in this?' for he mistook her silence for defiance. 'I must insist upon your promising me to hold no communication of any kind with Mr. Rowan henceforth.'

'If you will let me first explain to him——'

'Certainly not. Your intimacy with him needs explaining, though you don't choose to explain it; but no explanation is needed for your declining acquaintance with a man whose misconduct you should have been the first to resent.'

'Father, I think you have misjudged him.

There was some mistake——' But here she paused embarrassed. She could not incriminate Lucy by explaining the mistake, and there was no other way of setting her father right. But what could he think of this pleading for Rowan, and of her sudden embarrassment? There was but one thing to think—if there was no engagement there was an attachment between her and Rowan. If Lucy was not engaged to him, so far as Mary knew, then these secrets and confidences did not concern Lucy, but herself. If not why should she plead for Rowan in this broken and embarrassed way when she must know that her father would, and could, put no other construction upon her mediation? In truth, from her father's point of view, the evidence against Mary was now irresistible. Without condescending even to notice her wavering plea for Rowan he said, rising from his seat, pushing back his chair, and speaking as one delivering an ultimatum, 'I ask you once more do you mean to obey me in this matter?'

'Yes,' Mary answered coldly and curtly.

'You promise to hold henceforth no communication with Mr. Rowan?'

'Not without your consent.'

'Your promise is final and for life, then,' he sneered.

With the words in her ears Mary turned and left the room. What had she given up finally and for life? Mr. Rowan was nothing to her, and never would have been anything to her; and yet—and yet—the promise just extorted from her made her utterly wretched. She went up to her room, reopened the letter she had written to Lucy, and filled another sheet with a description of the interview she had just had with her father. She put as strongly as she could her helplessness to decline the pledge exacted from her, and her unhappiness in giving it. Perhaps it was disingenuous in her to try in this way and through Lucy to make to Rowan the explanation her father forbade her to make to him directly.



CHAPTER XI.

A HOST OF ACCUSERS.

Mary, having begun her letter by making little of Mr. Rowan's illness and much of his heroism, proceeded to upbraid Lucy somewhat bitterly with her lack of sisterly confidence. Only their engagement, she wrote, could justify Mr. Rowan in taking Lucy's extreme interest in him for granted, and of this engagement Lucy had given her no hint. Mr. Rowan himself, acting probably upon instructions from Lucy, so far from giving any hint of it, had led her to believe that he knew of Lucy only what he heard from her. Mary then went on to describe her interview with Rowan in the hospital, and had just brought her description to a close when her father's summons interrupted her letter and

supplied her with fresh matter to put in it. She closed it with an account of her interview with her father in the study; and, as we have seen, reopened it to describe in a long postscript the sequel of that interview. The letter reflected faithfully, in fact, both the irritation and the depression under which it was written.

To this letter Lucy made a diplomatic and sprightly reply, sufficiently characteristic of the writer to be given at length.

'My dear Mary—Your letter's like the *Commination Service*—all groans and curses. I am unsisterly, am I? and underhand, and a corruptor of youth, even of that ingenuous youth, Mr. Rowan, because I said nothing, and allowed him to say nothing, of our engagement? Did it never occur to you, you dear old croaking, moping Mopse, that there might be reasons for saying nothing to you about our engagement? As, for instance, that you can't bear secrets, and can't keep them; that you would disapprove of the engagement, and that *there is no engagement at all!* What have you to say now? Well, there isn't; not what *I* consider an engagement; whatever Mr. Rowan may choose to consider it. Do you remember your excuse for saddling me with that *odious* tippet. (I tried to wear it last Sunday, but it dished me up so like John the Baptist's head on a

charger that I declare I felt almost profane.) But do you remember your excuse for palming it off upon me? That Leech and Lutterworth worried you to death to let them send it *on approval.* That's just about how we stand—Mr. Rowan and I. He worried me to death that evening of our *elopement* to accept him on approval, and I did; but I don't consider myself bound to take either him or the tippet. There! I can just see you shaking your hoary head: "It's not fair to Mr. Rowan. She ought to make up her mind." My dear, there isn't stuff enough in my mind of one kind and colour to make up into anything. It's all odds and ends and remnants, higgledy-piggledy, like a rag bag. I don't deserve him, do I? I don't, I know. He's quite a hero according to the papers and according to *you;* and as for poor little me, I'm anything but a heroine. But you and the papers don't agree about the gravity of the accident, as they make it out to have been a *great deal worse* than you say. Do tell me what you *really* think of him. Is he likely to be soon well and *quite* well; as well, I mean, as ever he was.

'I have written to tell him of the scrape he got you into, and *of the promise father extorted from you.* You meant me to, didn't you? Of course you did. I told him you were *utterly wretched* about it! Perhaps the tippet after all may be kept *in the family*, even if *I* decide to decline it! Now, Mary, it's no use getting into a rage, for by the time you've written it all down you'll have cooled, and then you'll have to "tear your passion to rags," and to write your letter all over again. Besides,

you scolded me enough in your last. I never read such a letter, four pages of slaps and eight pages of groans! Just fancy sending eight pages of groans to Uncle Zachœus' house—coals to Newcastle. My dear, I've "all the comforts of a home" here without troubling you to send those I left behind me in the vicarage. See how everything went wrong the moment my back was turned! If I had only stayed at home and kept you under my eye.

'Mary, dear, you should be more careful. It isn't that you are "fast," as they call it, at bottom; but you are giddy and thoughtless, and need to be reminded each hour of the next. I don't say, dear, it was *improper*, but it was *imprudent* to visit Mr. Rowan on the very morning after the accident, when all Milbank was talking of it, and Miss Ripple was sure to run to see him and *save* him. It was thoughtless, dear, very thoughtless; but you've paid for it, and I shall say no more. "Experience is a torch which gives light only on the condition of burning," etc. etc. etc. etc. No, but seriously, you dear old Mopse, I am very sorry you have had all this worry on my account; I am indeed. I know what it is to be afraid to come down to any meal, or to look up while you're at it, or to get up when it's over, lest a breath might bring down the avalanche; but I never knew what it was to have no one to speak to, or to speak to me about it; for you were always ready, you good old grandmother, to take me on your knee and pet me out of my petulance. I declare I often wonder now how patiently you put up with all my tempers and tantrums; but you're just an angel *with the starch taken out*. I know

what *I* should do in your place to get back my peace of mind; I should have a regular millennial Armageddon with Miss Ripple, and prove to her that she was "the Beast." Little wretch! She should be locked up somewhere—in an Idiot Asylum—if, as you say, she doesn't know she's always making mischief. I wonder did they let her loose upon poor Mr. Rowan? The doctor here tells me that in severe cases of concussion of the brain the least noise is an agony of irritation, and she's enough to drive one wild when one's well. But I should think the doctors will know by this that she's one of the seven last plagues.

'Talking of concussion of the brain, I was nearly having my own knocked in or out a week ago! It's quite time I told you, isn't it? But I didn't mean to tell you till I saw you, as it's a long story, and I haven't told it to any one else, and I *don't want any one else to know of it*, it makes me look so foolish.'

Here Lucy narrated pretty accurately the incidents of the picnic up to her headlong climb of the Brow, but at this point she took the liberty of making much less at once of her peril and of her rescue than the truth required. Of the hero of the adventure she said only and almost casually:

'Curiously enough, my deliverer was Giant Despair, who thus made me some amends for the fright he gave me when he fished me.'

For she had narrated the fishing adventure to Mary in a former letter. Immediately after this cursory mention of Giant Despair, she spoke of being cut off now from all communication direct and indirect with Rowan,—

'unless he communicates with me through Miss Ripple or an advertisement in the *Times;* but as he is in no danger, I shall not be *miserable* about him, especially as you are sure to put yourself in the way of hearing all you can concerning him on *my* account, of course! I've just read this precious letter over with the kind of shudder and shrug father gives when he tastes a salad of my compounding, from which something essential is sure to have been left out by poor feather-brained me. What have I left out in this hotch-potch? Heart, my dear, heart; it's a heartless production and lightheaded besides. But "Martha," who is going to give a party, has been in *four* times to consult me on the proper disposition of napkins on the table. If I had shut my eyes I could have fancied myself listening to the Rev. Charles Cummin on vestments; and *you* know what that is. How would you like to have to write a letter with the Rev. Charles asking you twenty times over the same idiotic question about a stole or a cope? Therefore pity and pardon me, and spare me a second scolding, and then there'll be less vinegar and more oil in the next salad.—Ever, you dear old Mopse, your loving sister, LUCY.

'*P.S.*—Now don't be cross about *the tippet.*'

This letter perplexed Mary greatly; it expressed so little alarm, anxiety, interest even, about Mr. Rowan. If Lucy had been as indifferent as she seemed, she would probably have expressed an excess of concern about him. But, on the other hand, her casual mention of her rescue by Giant Despair was suspicious for the very same reason. She would probably have made more of it, if she had thought less of it. To any one with the least knowledge of Lucy both these conclusions would have seemed certain, if they had not unfortunately clashed. If Giant Despair had replaced Mr. Rowan in her fickle affections, probably half her letter would have been taken up with admiration of Mr. Rowan's heroism and anxiety for his recovery. On the other hand, if Giant Despair was nothing to her, she would not have waited a week to write of him and of his rescue of her, nor have mentioned them then so slightly and slightingly.

It was the clashing of these two conclusions which so perplexed Mary.

On the whole, she believed that Lucy was constant to Mr. Rowan, however she may have lightened the dreary hours of her exile by a flirtation with Giant Despair, and believed it on the singular ground that, if Lucy had had the least intention of giving up Mr. Rowan, she would never have spoken of handing him over to her. For Mary knew how greatly aggrieved Lucy felt by any one's taking one of her derelicts in charge; and that she was little likely to suggest an idea so distasteful to her if there had been the slightest chance of its realisation.

As for the young lady's repudiation of any engagement to Mr. Rowan, Mary construed it according to her knowledge of Lucy's usual way of regarding 'the reciprocity as all on one side' in her relations with the opposite sex.

If Mary's reading all this between the lines of Lucy's letter should seem cynical or unsisterly, it must be remembered, in the first place, that Mary was no fool, and in the second, that Lucy almost always wrote and talked to

her in cypher, so to speak. Her words had to be interpreted, not according to their plain meaning, but by the key of her character. She made herself out either better than she was, or worse than she was, and thought mystery romantic, and could never resist saying a smart thing even at the expense of herself, of her friend, or of truth.

Mary, therefore, could hardly have helped reading between the lines of the letter in the way she did, even if her penetration had not been quickened by annoyance. But it was; for she was sorely annoyed by the suggestion made again and again in the letter that she herself cared for Rowan. Lucy, who was anything but ill-natured, would never have made this suggestion if she had had any idea how deeply it would pain Mary; but then Lucy had no idea of the amount of truth in the libel which gave it its sting.

Nor again had she any idea of the amount of annoyance of the same kind which Mary had now to endure. Miss Ripple, like the little busy bee, carried the seed of scandal

from flower to flower, throughout the whole fair garden of girls in Milbank; to be disseminated by each flower in turn till it soon overspread all the town and its most distant suburbs. The circumstances of the case, indeed, made this inevitable. While the Lisle and Rowan scandal was yet in all mouths the explosion occurred to bring together the two names—now in the most romantic conceivable connection. Every one, young and old, rich and poor, in Milbank talked of the explosion and of nothing but the explosion for a week; and it was little likely that the incident needed to make Rowan's heroism romantic should be left out of any conversation.

Miss Lisle *alone* was allowed into Mr. Rowan's room on the day after the accident. But Mr. Lisle was still at daggers drawn with Mr. Rowan, and, indeed, was almost beside himself (*teste* Miss Sprott) when he heard of the interview. Therefore, there was a clandestine engagement between Miss Lisle and Mr. Rowan—Q.E.D.

In truth, to the feminine mind of Milbank

the thing was as clear as a demonstration in Euclid. Now, the opinions of the feminine mind on such subjects differ as the juice of the grape differs according to the stages it has gone through. There is first must, then wine, and then vinegar; the opinions of the young maids were tart as must; those of the old maids were sour as vinegar; but those of the matrons, for the most part, were generous as wine. The young maids were not, of course, jealous, nor the old maids envious, but both were scandalised by the forwardness and frowardness of Mary. But the matrons, speaking generally, saw nothing very scandalous either in her engagement, or in her visit to Rowan in hospital. The very openness of her visit, in fact, was in itself evidence against her engagement being clandestine at all. It was most probable that her father knew, though he disapproved of it; and that it was his disapproval of it which led him to treat Mr. Rowan with such extreme harshness. In this way argued the most genial and romantic amongst the matrons.

Thus it came about that in nearly every house in Milbank Mary's relations to Rowan and their propriety were subjects of discussion; and it was only Mary's chilling reserve which prevented their being discussed in her own house and presence. A host of callers, some sympathetic, some spiteful, all gossips, hurried to see her, to get from her own lips what confirmation they could of their impressions of the affair. They talked to rags the explosion and Rowan's heroism; and then, wheeling hawk-like nearer in narrowing circles, they spoke of his danger, of the necessity to him of absolute quiet, of the very police authorities being excluded rigorously from his room, and finally of the single and singular exception made in Mary's favour.

'Of course, my dear, they had to let *you* in,' with a knowing nod and smile.

'They would have let in any one Mr. Rowan wished to see; and he wished to see me for a moment to ask me to do something for him,' Mary would reply freezingly, and then turn the conversation.

On the other hand the young ladies whom she met in her walks abroad would, after a little preliminary talk on the subject of the day, ask innocently, 'If Mr. Rowan was in the children's ward?' or some equally ingenuous question. And it may be remarked that the young ladies who were the most spiteful in intention were the most artless in manner and expression—as the deadly digitalis is the most innocent seeming of all our wild wood flowers. If, again, Mary went her round of visits amongst the poor, in almost every house she would be accosted thus on her entry, without preface or periphrase, 'Tha'rt keeping company wi' Mr. Rowan! Eh, aw wor fain when aw heeard it;' or, 'Tha'rt bahn to wed yon Rowan, they tell me, miss!'

Then, on her return home, utterly out of heart and humiliated, her father's sullen silence and sour looks reproached her with the same accusation; and upon all this comes Lucy's flippant reiteration of the charge to crown poor Mary's mortification.

But no; the crowning mortification was the

accusation, not of Lucy, or of her father, or of the girls and gossips of Milbank, but of her own heart. She did care for Rowan. The accident had at once ripened and revealed her feeling towards him—not through the admiration, but through the pity for him it had excited in her heart. If it had been through admiration of his bravery that her feeling for him had grown above ground, she would certainly not have sent him the flowers. It was after she had sent them that this feeling sprang into light; for all her woman's heart went out to him at sight of his drawn, gray, and ghastly face. It so haunted and moved her as to be more in her mind even than her father's wrath, Lucy's innuendos, or the mortifying gossip of Milbank—all which ought, one would have said, to have exorcised it, if anything could.

But ought it? If love has got hold of a heart does not opposition of this kind blow into a blaze the flame it tries to blow out? It may so be blown out, perhaps, in a heart where the flame has taken little hold, or

where there's little hold for it to take; but a fire that has long been smouldering amongst solid fuel is fed and fanned by all such attempts to extinguish it. Besides, we may say to 'parents and guardians,' that the worst way in the world to ween a young girl's affections from an ineligible lover is to keep him constantly before her mind by incessant depreciation or denunciation. Even if this disparagement has not of itself the opposite effect to that intended, it serves a purpose, which is all in all to love, that of keeping 'the detrimental' ever in the lady's thoughts. Brooding quickens and matures love as certainly as it quickens and matures 'the dove's golden couplets when disclosed.'



CHAPTER XII.

SCANDAL NO. III.

MILBANK, as we have seen, had not ceased to talk of the Lisle and Rowan scandal when the explosion occurred to couple the names again together in all conversations; and hardly had the explosion, etc., died out of the daily talk of the townsfolk when they were startled by another sensation which set all tongues wagging with these two names still upon them. This sensational event, its causes and its consequences, we must now proceed to narrate.

If Miss Ripple was prevented by maiden modesty from 'personally conducting' Rowan back to the fold, so long as he was confined to bed, at least she could send him guide-books to point out to him the route. Accord-

ingly she plied him with tracts so selected that their very titles would catch his eye, and touch his heart by the directness of their appeal to his particular case and circumstances —the case and circumstances of an apostate prophet overtaken by so swift and sharp a punishment for his apostasy. Surely Mr. Rowan would read his own story in the very titles of such tracts as *Repentance*, or, *The Whale's Belly; Am I not Thine Ass;* or, *The Prophet's Foot Crushed; Art Thou a Sheep, or a Goat?* etc. etc. etc.

With shrapnel of this sort she shelled the enemy so long as he remained inaccessible in his entrenchments, in order to strike into his heart such terror that her victory, when she could come at last to close quarters, might be speedy and assured. But her artillery was so effective as almost to defeat its own object. It made upon the enemy such an impression that he dreaded above all things a hand-to-hand encounter with the wielder of these thunderbolts.

'Old Mother Ripple,' as the irreverent

Tipper, the house-surgeon, invariably called her, would ask him daily, 'If Mr. Rowan were allowed up yet?' Tipper, who objected strongly to the hospital's being likened to the whale's belly in the first of the aforementioned tracts, would either answer curtly, 'No;' or grumble that, 'He wasn't likely to be allowed up to be baited and badgered back into bed again.' Whereupon Miss Ripple would say with a shake of the head:

'Mr. Tipper, there's something besides the body to be considered.'

And the profane Tipper would retort, 'But he takes his tracts regular, Miss Ripple; they'll pull him through, never fear.'

When Miss Ripple's eagerness to see and save him was reported by the grinning Tipper to Rowan, he exclaimed irritably that 'Nothing would induce him to see her.' He had heard from Lucy that it was Miss Ripple who had made all the mischief between Mary and her father, and this alone rendered her insupportably odious in his eyes.

'You must remain in bed till the millennium,

then ; so sure as you break cover she's down on you,' Tipper replied cheerily.

'You shouldn't allow such a woman into the hospital at all ; you might as well let the Salvation Army loose in the wards.'

'She's one of our biggest subscribers ; that's where it is. She pays for her whistle, and it isn't the Governors who have to listen to it, you see.'

'I shall not see her,' Rowan said doggedly.

'If I tell her that she'll insist on knowing the reason why from yourself.'

'"Shut, shut the door, and say I'm sick, I'm dead,"' quoted Rowan. 'Order me absolute seclusion and silence, like a good fellow. I can't stand seeing any one at present, and that woman least of all.' And, indeed, he was not only irritable from the state of his brain, but had much besides to irritate him, and make such officious visits from any one intolerable.

'But,' persisted the facetious Tipper with an admirable imitation of Miss Ripple's voice, manner, and foreboding shake of the head,

'But she says, "there's something besides the body to consider."'

'Then I wish she'd consider it, and not cause half the bad feeling and half the bad language in Milbank,' Rowan exclaimed, fretfully conscious that his own spiritual state was not the healthier by any means for Miss Ripple's drastic drugs of divinity, and for the prospect of her personal attendance upon him. 'She does more mischief in a day with her tattle than good in a year with her preaching. You may tell her that I decline to see her, or to receive any more of her tracts.'

'But I've told her you took them regular—three times a day, and two at bedtime—with such good results that there was nothing of the goat left now but your beard.'

Rowan laughed. 'Well, if you could say that, you can say I'm too ill to see any one. Anyhow, I shall not see her.'

Thus it happened that Tipper represented to Miss Ripple, Miss Sprott, and all other officious inquirers, Rowan's condition to be much more critical than it really was. He

hinted darkly to Miss Ripple especially, that it might be a serious matter for her if there were an inquest; for excitement, and especially religious excitement, 'would knock him off the perch to a dead certainty.' At the same time he pressed her daily for a further supply of tracts, not so much to satisfy and hold her at bay as to enjoy the spectacle of Rowan's face at sight of them. 'Come, come,' he'd say encouragingly, 'hold your nose, and take 'em off quick, and you'll hardly taste 'em.' Thus the facetious Tipper, by representing Rowan as in a very precarious balance on 'his perch,' kept off the foe. But it was from these representations that Mary formed her ideas of Rowan's condition.

Miss Ripple, who was a kind-hearted little woman, and, therefore, a matchmaker, was set upon the millennial reconciliation of Mr. Lisle and Mr. Rowan through the marriage of the latter to Mary. Even if Miss Ripple had been sure that such a union would involve the violation of the Levitical law (which forbade the yoking together of an ox and an

ass), yet would she have yearned and laboured to bring it about—so weak, after all, proves the strongest religious principle in a conflict with natural instinct.

But she was not at all sure that Mary, married to Mr. Rowan, would be unequally yoked with an unbeliever; for the amount of tracts consumed daily by the patient was portentous and encouraging. Who knows but that to her might fall the threefold glory of bringing about (1) Mr. Rowan's conversion; (2) his marriage to Mary; and (3) his millennial reconciliation with her father. With this tiara, or triple crown of glory, in view, she lost no opportunity, but made many, to meet and impart to Mary confidentially Mr. Rowan's spiritual and temporal progress, as she was herself advised of them by the unblushing Tipper.

To one, at least, of these bulletins Mary, while affecting hardly to hear it, listened always eagerly. She had no doubt that the bulletin respecting Mr. Rowan's spiritual progress was the invention of the facetious Mr. Tipper; for it was not conceivable that

any man of any education would read Miss Ripple's favourite tracts. But the bulletin of the patient's temporal condition Mary accepted implicitly, as she could think of no motive for Mr. Tipper's colouring it black. It is true, it differed from the accounts of himself Mr. Rowan could now scribble off with his left hand to Lucy, and which Lucy as regularly reported to her; but then he would of course colour brightly these, as he had coloured brightly the first account of himself sent through her to Lucy. As no one in Milbank but the irrepressible Miss Ripple dare speak to Mary of Rowan after the severe snubbing she had administered to the most ill-natured of her tormentors, she was dependent for all she could hear about him upon Lucy and our millennial little friend.

When we say no one in Milbank, we speak generally, for certainly Mr. Holroyd (who was about as sensitive as an elephant on an ant-hill to the pain he gave or the stings he got when he trod on any one's finer feelings) would have rallied Mary in

his light and graceful way about Rowan if he had happened to meet her. But he did not —not till some weeks after their encounter in the hospital; for Mary had put off nervously applying to him for a subscription—long over-due—in her fear of his boisterous banter. At last, however, she screwed her courage up to call for it—but not at his office, where some one else might possibly be present to witness and to deepen her mortification—but at his house. Here she sought him on Saturday afternoon, when, as the factory was closed, he was nearly sure to be at home.

He was at home, and Mary was shown at once into his drawing-room—a dead room, with all the fixed and stony aspect and chill atmosphere of death about it. Hardly any one but the housemaid ever entered it from year's end to year's end, and the stiff and shrouded furniture was never moved, and looked immovable. Even the pictures, whose massive gilt frames were shrouded in muslin, had to Mary's fancy the look of the dead—the look of not being looked at.

In this icy room Mary was not left long to shudder alone, for Mr. Holroyd soon strode in with his free foot.

'How do you do, Miss Lisle?' he said, with more heartiness of manner even than usual. 'I am glad you've come; I am that.'

'For a subscription?' Mary asked, smiling, as she shook hands with him.

'Is *that* what you've come for?' he asked in turn, with a significant stress upon the 'that.'

'Yes; it's what I always come for, isn't it?'

'Not always,' he rejoined still more significantly. 'It wasn't about a subscription you came to me last time, eh?' with a smile as broad as the hint.

Mary coloured up to the roots of her hair. Here was the dreaded subject being dragged in at the very start.

But Mr. Holroyd was not in the least embarrassed by her painful embarrassment.

'You did me a good turn then, and I ought to do you a good turn now; and I've the good luck to be able. You haven't heard of my good luck?'

'No,' Mary replied perplexedly.

'I thought you must have heard of it and have come to congratulate me,' he rejoined, looking at her interrogatively and archly, with his head on one side, bird-fashion.

Mary thought from his arch and marked manner that Mr. Rowan must be in some way mixed up with this 'good luck,' but she could not think how; wherefore she answered somewhat coldly, 'No; I have heard nothing.'

'Then you shall see it—you shall see it. That will be better than hearing of it, eh? Come along and I'll show it to you, Miss Lisle.' Mary followed in deeper and deeper bewilderment. She was certain now that this thing had nothing to do with Mr. Rowan, but she could form no idea, not the most distant guess, of what it was. Mr. Holroyd preceded her to the smoking-room, threw open the door for her to enter, and then, without entering himself, closed it behind her!

As the door closed behind her, before her

sprang up from an arm-chair, in which he had been buried, Mr. Rowan!

'Mr. Rowan!' she exclaimed in as much amazement as if it had been his ghost that stood before her. And, indeed, Miss Ripple's account of the patient's condition had rather prepared her to hear of his death than to see him so far back upon the road to life. He looked gaunt and pale and haggard still; but he was far more like his old self than like the face which had so haunted her since she saw it in the hospital. He also, though of course in a far less degree, was surprised to see her, and it was a moment before he so far recovered himself as to advance to offer his left hand, for his right was in a sling.

'You didn't expect to find me here?' he said, as she took his hand mechanically.

'I thought—— Miss Ripple told me you were still very ill,' she stammered, saying in her bewilderment exactly what was passing through her mind.

'It was an impious fraud,' he said, with his old pleasant smile. 'If I hadn't been

very ill to Miss Ripple, I should have been still very ill, for she would have attended me spiritually. But Mr. Tipper must have put it rather strongly, for you look as if I ought to be a ghost.'

'I had no idea of your being out of the hospital,' Mary answered, at a complete loss for anything better to say.

'I came out only this morning. Mr. Holroyd wouldn't hear of my going back to my lodgings until I had quite recovered, and so he has kindly carried me here. He has been more than kind all through.'

By this Mary had so far recovered from her amazement at sight of Rowan as to become conscious of the unfortunate and false position into which Mr. Holroyd had thrust her. All the significance of his words and meaning manner flashed now suddenly upon her. Absolutely he had suspected her of coming here to see, or at least inquire after, Mr. Rowan! And what would the spiteful gossips of Milbank—what would her father think of her visit? She must be the

first to report and explain it to her father immediately upon her return home; and as for the spiteful gossip of Milbank, what mattered it? But it did matter, as she felt, in spite of her professed scorn.

Such thoughts passing swiftly through her mind chilled suddenly her manner to Rowan.

'I need not say, Mr. Rowan, that I should not have intruded upon you if I had known you were here. Mr. Holroyd——'

'I hope you'll excuse him. I'm sure you'd excuse him if you knew how much I wished to see you—wished to say to you,' Rowan broke in hurriedly; and then he added more hesitatingly, as hardly knowing how to express himself without offence, 'I wished to thank you again and again for the great kindness you did me on the morning after the accident at the cost of so much annoyance to yourself. And, besides, I wanted so much to speak to you about——'

But here Mary stopped him. His words had merely made her more miserable at the prospect of the further annoyance this visit

would occasion her, and in the consciousness that a prolongation of the interview would be a deliberate breach of her promise to her father.

'I cannot stay; I am not free to stay; you will understand——'

'Only one moment,' he cried, laying appealingly his wasted hand upon hers; 'I must speak to you; I was going to write, but I couldn't well explain in a letter.'

At this moment and before he could withdraw the hand that rested upon hers Mr. Lisle entered the room.

It happened that Mary and he had met within ten minutes the same member of the congregation, a Mrs. Spreckly, a well-intentioned, if feeble old lady, who having for conversation's sake asked Mary where she was going, repeated her answer for conversation's sake a little later to Mr. Lisle. Now the vicar, having heard that Mr. Holroyd had carried off Rowan to his house that morning, could imagine but one motive for Mary's visit. Wherefore he amazed Mrs. Spreckly by rushing wildly away without a

word of answer or adieu. When he reached Bessemer Hall he asked only for Miss Lisle, and was therefore shown into the smoking-room straightway.

He took in at a glance Rowan's pleading attitude—his hand on hers—and Mary's miserable confusion. He looked, inarticulate with rage, from one to another, then turned sharply to hold open the door for Mary to pass out. Rowan was taken aback so completely that before he could say more of his intended exculpation of Mary than, 'Miss Lisle had no——,' the room door, and almost immediately afterwards the hall door, were shut sharply behind them.

'This is your promise!' Mr. Lisle hissed out, after they had gone a few steps down the avenue.

'I called for a subscription. I didn't know Mr. Rowan was here.'

'Not when you were closeted in that room with him with his hand on yours!'

'Mr. Holroyd showed me into the room without telling me who was there.'

'Did Mr. Holroyd force you to stay there alone with him, to listen to him, to allow him to take your hand, to break the solemn promise—— I cannot believe you. How can I believe you? If you can break such a promise in such a way, there's nothing sacred to you—nothing!'

These words were really terrible to Mary. They seemed suddenly to turn her to stone. She walked on by her father's side cold, white, mute, with head erect and lips compressed. But her father, with the evidence of his own eyes to convince him of her faithlessness, naturally took her silence for an avowal of guilt. If such a solemn promise meant so little to her, what was her word worth? Thus he reasoned in his fury, when her silence seemed an admission of the main charge made against her.

'You didn't know he was there? Every one knew he was there; the whole town talked of it, as they'll talk of this new scandal and disgrace. What took you——'

Here Mary stopped suddenly and turned

to face her father. 'Father, you do not —you cannot believe that I went there to see Mr. Rowan,' she cried, not appealingly, but indignantly.

'I can believe my own eyes,' he answered doggedly, turning to walk sullenly on, as though he cared not whether she followed or no.

Mary walked on beside him in silence for a moment, and said then in a chill and stately way, 'I was quitting the room as you entered it, and I had not been two minutes there.'

'You seemed eager to quit it,' he sneered. Not another word was spoken by either for the rest of the walk. Mary's self-respect, deeper even than her respect for her father, had been wounded again and again by him within the last few weeks, but never so cruelly as now. They were, too, *Et tu, Brute* wounds, made in the envious rents pierced by other daggers; made by the one who should have been the last to inflict them; and made, besides and above all, in a vital place. If Mary had cared nothing

for Rowan, she would have cared comparatively little for these insults and assaults; which were so effective because they had found a weak place in her armour. As it was, she was so embittered by them as to be in a mood of rebellion against all Milbank, against her father, against her own heart.

Of this rebellious mood her father suddenly was made conscious when Mary challenged him to say if he believed really the monstrous charge he made against her. This challenge was made so defiantly by the usually subject and submissive Mary that he was confounded, and at the same time confirmed in his conviction that she had changed her allegiance. It seemed to him that she was trying to provoke a breach that would justify her to herself for going over openly to the enemy; for as to her being secretly engaged heart and hand to Rowan he had now little doubt. He would not give her the occasion of open rebellion that she sought; but, at the same time, he would most certainly not permit

these clandestine meetings. Thinking all this well over on the way home, he kept a discreet silence, and, indeed, never opened his lips to say anything he could help to Mary till the next morning but one—Monday morning—at breakfast. Then he said, 'If you still wish to see your sister, I've now no objection to your joining her.' It was the one thing of all others Mary longed to do, both for her own sake and for that of Lucy, about whom she was getting seriously uneasy. Wherefore she astonished her father by the eagerness of her assent to the proposal. 'I should like to go greatly,' she said.

'Then you can go, if your uncle will have you. I shall write to-day to ask him.'

He was perplexed by her obviously unaffected eagerness to go. What did it mean? That it meant her gladness to get out of her ears, and, if possible, out of her mind, the stinging scandal of Milbank, he did not believe. Still less would he have believed that it meant eagerness to fly from her own heart, as it were; to find a healthy distraction

of thought in attending to Lucy's affairs. No; her gladness to go had some connection, and close connection, with 'this Rowan intrigue,' as he had come now in his own mind to call it. But in what way it was so connected he could not see, unless that she considered a correspondence with Rowan from Burnside safer than clandestine meetings with him here. You see he had wholly lost faith in Mary. He had small faith in human nature generally, and was ready always to suggest small or base motives for any high or noble act of another of which he would himself have been incapable. If you showed him a rose, and raved over its exquisite beauty and perfume, he would dig down to turn up the dung at its root. 'There! That's what all your exquisite beauty and perfume springs from!' To a mind so deeply and basely suspicious, the evidence against Mary seemed, of course, overwhelming. After much meditation, therefore, over this perplexing readiness of hers to quit Milbank, he said at lunch to her, 'I've written to your uncle to ask if he can

have you on Thursday—Thursday will suit you?'

'Yes; very well.'

'I must ask you to promise not to correspond with Mr. Rowan,' he added icily.

'I had not the least intention of corresponding with Mr. Rowan,' Mary replied hotly—she was exceedingly angry.

'Then you promise?' he continued in the same exasperatingly measured tone.

'I've already promised,' she replied, rising to quit the room.

'Ah, yes; I had forgotten it was useless to ask you to promise,' he retorted sneeringly. He also was very angry at what seemed to him the defiant manner of one who hitherto had been the meekest of his subjects. Mary swept from the room without trusting herself to make any reply.

Thenceforward, to her departure, he hardly spoke to her, though she made many timid advances towards a reconciliation, for she could not endure this growing estrangement. He did not even accompany her to

the train, but bid her a chill good-bye at the vicarage door, and returned moodily to his study.

Here an hour later Miss Sprott found him, when she rushed in breathless with the news,—already half over Milbank,—'Miss Lisle had eloped with Mr. Rowan! They were seen to go off together that morning in the same train!'





CHAPTER XIII.

LUCY HAS THE HANDKERCHIEF FLUNG TO HER.

CERTAINLY Mr. Rowan and Mary had gone off in the same train, and for the same destination, but they did not even know that they were fellow-passengers. Neither knew of the other's intention to travel that day, nor had either seen the other on the platform. Yet it was through no mere casual coincidence that they took the same train for the same place, since Mary's visit to Burnside was, as we shall now proceed to show, the indirect cause of Rowan's sudden flight thither. His flight thither, we may say in passing, was so sudden that even Mr. Holroyd knew nothing of it till, on his return from the factory to lunch, he found a hasty

note from Rowan informing him only that he was hurried away most unexpectedly, and that he would probably write and explain matters in a day or two. This note left the mind of the Milbank gossips in little doubt about the elopement of the writer with Miss Lisle. Of course it was a letter from Lucy which hurried him off in this wild way, and to explain this letter we must return to that young lady.

It is now some weeks since we left Lucy in the act of making an appointment with Bluebeard which led to her meeting him not only next day, but almost every day thereafter. Thus she came to experience herself what she had so often pitilessly inflicted—the torment of a consuming passion. The girl had fancied herself in love with Rowan, yet till now she had really had no idea of what love was. She had been playing at love, like the child in the nursery tale who played at wolf till it found itself in the fangs of the fierce creature it mimicked. And now the passion played with her like a wild beast

with its prey—letting her fancy herself free, only to seize on her again more fiercely than ever; and fascinating her with a hopeless sense of helplessness—No passion she had ever inspired had been more fierce or over-mastering than this she endured. In truth, she had found her match. If he had been despairing and abject, hanging upon each of her moods, happy in her smile, wretched at her frown, waiting on each word as on a verdict, she would not have been enslaved so hopelessly. But he was nothing of the sort. He played with her a little, as he would have played a trout, until he felt secure of her, but thenceforward he seemed to take her worship of him for granted. It was vain for Lucy's self-respect to struggle against this high-handed, Sultanic treatment. He had fascinated her; and once a woman gives her whole heart to a man whom she respects, she loves and reveres him the more, the more masterful he shows himself.

But why should she give her whole heart so soon and so utterly to this man? We

might give the Byronic answer to the question if we had not the more particular and satisfactory answer to give, that he was the ideal hero not only of girls like Lucy, but of the great majority of girls—an extremely handsome man, of extraordinary strength of body, of passions, and of will, with a manner haughty and imperious, when it was not brusque almost to brutality. Such a man will not be the less worshipped by the majority of the gentler sex if his morals are as easy as his manners. Jessie of course succumbed at once to such charms; but they had an almost equal fascination for Lucy, who, besides, could appreciate what was out of sight of Jessie's mind—his readiness, cleverness, and biting cynicism. A sneer, which is the devil's crest, is to girls of Lucy's age and character a kind of blazon of mental nobility.

A week after Lucy had written the letter, in which Bluebeard was mentioned so indifferently, her heart was hopelessly his, though it was some time later before it was

made over to him formally. She had met him at the usual time and tryst—in the afternoon and underneath the oak in which he had secreted Jessie. Hitherto they had made lessons in angling the transparent pretext of their meetings, while the angling itself—practical instruction in the mode of holding the rod and assistance in the disentangling of the line—was made the transparent pretext for frequent touching and pressing of her hand. But to-day he had not even brought his fishing-rod, nor did she affect to miss it. After he had talked to her a little in his light, bright way, while she remained silent and *distrait*, he asked her abruptly, with an anxious look into her clouded face, 'What's the matter?'

'Oh, I don't know; I'm worried.'

'Yes?' he said interrogatively, as though it was the most natural thing in the world that she should tell all her troubles to him. But Lucy remained silent, with her eyes fixed on the ground at her feet, in which she was deepening a channel with the point of

her parasol. She was not coquetting at all; life of late had become too serious for trifling to her.

'What is it, Jessica?' he repeated in a soft, soothing tone. He had once called her 'Jessie' by mistake—a significant mistake. Though he saw more even of Jessie than of Lucy, he would not have made the slip if the mistress had held a most distinctly higher place in his mind than the maid. Having made the slip he had the readiness to explain that 'Jessie' was a mere diminutive of 'Jessica,' of whom Lucy somehow reminded him. Lucy, knowing and suspecting nothing of his relations with Jessie, at once accepted the explanation, but resented it rather. Her consciousness of a likeness in many points to the forward and unfilial Jewess made the compliment distasteful to her, until he gave her his reasons—extremely ingenious reasons—for considering Jessica one of the most charming of all the women of Shakespeare! Certainly he had an adroit and collected mind.

Having thus blundered upon the name, he adhered to it as an inoffensive and discreet compromise between the formality of 'Miss Lisle' and the familiarity of 'Lucy.'

'What is it, Jessica?'

'I suppose it's my conscience,' Lucy answered at last.

'Conscience! It's another name for low spirits. Instead of "conscience making cowards of us all," it's cowardice that creates a conscience. You're afraid of something or somebody; that's what you mean, eh?'

'Is that your idea of conscience?' she asked evasively.

'It's just what it is,' he replied very positively. 'You're in low spirits and afraid of something. Conscience is a ghost which is seen only by nervous people, and only in the dark; no one with a good spirit and in good spirits is troubled by it.'

Lucy reflected a little on this explanation of conscience as a ghost conjured up by the fearful imagination of nervous people in their dark hours, and found that it fitted in with

her own experience. With her, at least, conscience was the forecast shadow of some coming trouble; for, when things went well with her, her misdeeds gave her no compunction.

As she remained silent he asked, 'Well; what scrape have you got into?' speaking as assuredly as though she had told him she was in some scrape. 'Tell me, Jessica.'

'Why should I tell *you!* a father confessor who doesn't believe in a conscience!'

'Why should you tell me? Because your troubles are mine—because I love you. Will that do? Because I love you, Lucy,' putting his arm round her and pressing his lips to hers as confidently as if they had been engaged as long as they had known each other. It never seemed to occur to him that it was necessary, or customary, or common courtesy even, to ask for her love. He simply assumed it, and Lucy thought no worse of him for the assumption! Indeed, at the moment, she did not think at all of the assumption, for her heart was flooded to

overflowing with a happiness which drowned in it every thought but that of his love.

'You will tell me now, darling,' he whispered, drawing her closer to him with his left arm which was round her waist, while with his right hand he raised her blushing face till he forced her to look up into his. But Lucy was less likely now than ever to tell him what her trouble was, since it had to do with her relations to Rowan.

'What is it?'

'It's—it's our meetings,' she stammered.

'They've been discovered?' he asked anxiously, in accordance with his theory of conscience being but the echo of detection.

'No; not that I know of; but they're not right.'

'We've just made them right, haven't we?' he replied with a passionate kiss. 'So it's this that has been on our conscience! I might have known it was a sin, it was so delicious. Sin is the sauce of pleasure invented by some jaded voluptuary to give it a new zest.'

This kind of talk, to which of late she had got thoroughly used, seemed to Lucy very brave and brilliant. She did not think that it meant more or went deeper than her own flippant sallies. And if now it seemed out of place to her, it was only because he ought to think and speak only of love. Therefore, she somewhat pettishly withdrew her face from his caressing hand, thereby giving him the impression that she was offended by the practical tendency of such talk, whereas, to do her bare justice, this was not in all her thoughts.

'But you don't think our meetings wrong now, Lucy? Now that we are engaged? I have a right to my own, haven't I? to my very own,' pressing her to him and sealing with the seals of love this appropriation of her.

'But the secrecy is wrong,' murmured Lucy, suddenly become scrupulous.

'Not when there's no help for it, and there isn't at present, my darling. It's the old story of youth and beauty being sold to withered and wealthy age. I am dependent

upon my father, and he insists upon my marrying the old Lady of Threadneedle Street herself.'

'Oh, it's *you* that are youth and beauty,' Lucy exclaimed in the tone of one who hears an unexpected answer to a riddle.

'Have you only found that out now?' he asked ruefully.

'I haven't seen the old Lady of Threadneedle Street, you know—she must be something terrible.' Then Lucy became extremely anxious to hear all about her rich rival, but could learn only that her father had been in trade of some sort—cotton, or soap, or something—had realised a vast fortune, and had bought the next estate to that of his father. But what the girl herself was like she could hardly make out from his description. 'She looked,' he said, 'as if she had been a long time in the window,'—exposed for sale, that is. But what was the stuff, style, or pattern of the goods, thus faded from long exposure, he could not or did not say.

'I never saw anything like you women,'

he said in his superb way, as though he were speaking of another and lower race; 'you'd be jealous of an Egyptian mummy.'

'When so much youth and beauty is at stake!'

'The stake matters no more to you than it matters to an inveterate gambler. You're jealous even about some one you yourself care nothing for. A woman will jilt or reject a man and yet resent his acceptance by another woman, as if she was robbed of what she had flung away. Jealousy, thy name is woman!'

'You seem to have had a good deal of experience.'

'There! Jealousy again! As if it mattered to you—as if there was any one like you! You'd be jealous of your own face in the glass; and it's the only face in the world of which you could reasonably be jealous.'

This pretty speech conciliated Lucy, who not unnaturally resented his cool moralising about women in general, etc., as inconsistent with the first transports of an accepted lover.

'Men are never jealous!' she pouted.

'We're never jealous in a dog-in-the-manger way. We don't grudge to another what we don't want for ourselves. But when we care for any one we can be jealous to some purpose. If *you* gave a man cause to be jealous, for instance, he would—— well, it depends on the man. If he was a coward, he would kill you; if he was a fool, he would kill himself; if he was a man, he would kill his rival.'

These 'brave words' chilled Lucy to silence. It is true Henry Rowan would do none of these things; but he would not feel the less because his feelings would seek no such violent vents.

'Conscience aching still? You'll never be easy till you're rid of it altogether, like a troublesome tooth,' he said, misconstruing her overcast face and her silence. 'What's the harm of a little romantic secrecy? Besides, it's only for a time, and a short time too, I should say. I can't always be dry-nursing this cousin of mine; and he

would drink himself to death in a month if I left him to himself. Then I should be the Lord of Burleigh, and you——' filling up the aposiopesis with a kiss.

'It's noble of you!' Lucy cried with an enthusiasm born of love.

'What? This?' kissing her again.

'No; but, Hugh, it really is good of you to shut yourself up here to take care of him,' Lucy said, blushing as she used his Christian name for the first time.

'Not it. If I hadn't taken care of him his steward's daughter would have done it, and would have married him for her pains.'

'Does she live here?'

'No; at Elmsmere. I brought him down here to escape her. You see, he has drunk himself into what you call a conscience till he can be frightened by any one into anything'—a delicate way of describing Sir Edward's willingness to make a girl he had seduced the reparation of marriage.

'It must be terrible to be shut in with him,' cried Lucy with a shudder.

'It isn't cheerful, certainly. He either has the horrors and "sees more devils than vast hell can hold," or he is in such frightful spirits that he gives you the horrors. One is glad to get out of it into heaven, dearest.'

Here followed a fair stretch of 'heaven'—of billing and cooing, and interchange of protestations, and of comparisons of the dates of the dawn of love in each heart, and of baby babble more eloquent than the tongues of men and of angels; or of silences more eloquent still, when Lucy's heart, like the river before her, now in flood with the autumn rains, was hushed by its very fulness. She had no philosophic coolness to complain of now, and the deep draughts of love she drank in drowned all thoughts of her troubles and entanglements—of Henry Rowan and Mary—of her father and uncle—of life and time and everything and every one but her love and her lover. That hour had no past and no future for her, but only a now like the eternal now of heaven. Time for her stood still in the stillness of the autumn afternoon,

in which the dead leaf dropped straight down like lead from the bough above her, and the shadow of a little cloud at her foot seemed asleep in the golden sunlight. There was no breath or stir to wake her from her delirious dream for one swift, sweet hour, and she would have long outstayed her usual time if the sound of an approaching footstep had not startled her to her feet. He too sprang up at the same moment and advanced hastily in the direction from which the sound proceeded, while she sped swiftly away in the opposite direction—her road home. 'To-morrow,' he whispered as they parted, and she nodded a silent and hasty assent.

Hardly had she got out of sight round a turn in the path when 'Rufus,' the little baronet, appeared, this time unattended, and in no need of attendance. He was in that state of abject depression and repentance which his cousin described to Lucy as giving others the horrors the patient had just recovered from himself. His cousin's 'dry-nursing' did not seem to have done much for

him, as he looked a more rickety wreck than ever. He was the last man in the world one would have judged from his appearance to be a drunkard, as he was spare and pale, with pinched features, and rather a refined expression. He was, however, an absolute contrast to his cousin, not in physique only, but in character, being as weak in will as in body. He was a mere echo and shadow of a man, and looked, like a dog, to some superior being for courage and guidance. Therefore he had come to depend upon his cousin for moral nerve, as much as he had come to depend upon stimulants for physical nerve.





CHAPTER XIV.

A SPIRITUAL ADVISER.

'I THOUGHT you were in bed,' cried Hugh in an aggrieved tone of reproof—for the baronet turned day into night and night into day still—but now rather through terror than through recklessness.

'I couldn't sleep. Why did you leave me? You said you wouldn't leave me.'

'Don't be such a baby,' Hugh cried contemptuously.

'I'm so wretched—I'm utterly wretched, Hugh.'

'What on earth have you to be wretched about?'

The baronet was silent, looking blankly before him, and nervously, with a trembling hand, plucking at his coat. At last he said

in a low voice, and with an anxious and fearful look into his cousin's face, 'Hugh, I don't think I've long to live.'

'Pooh! Nonsense! You've got a bit of a shake, but you'll be all right in a month.'

After another and longer pause of silence the baronet said again in a pitiful voice, 'I'm utterly wretched.'

'What's the good of whining over the past?' cried Hugh irritably. 'It's done with.'

'No, no; it's not done with. Does this look as if it was done with?' holding out his white, wasted, and clammy hands with their trembling fingers wide apart. 'Besides—besides——' Here he stopped in great agitation.

'Besides what?'

'Hugh, I'm not fit to die.'

'Well; you're not going to die.'

'But something tells me——'

'"Something tells you!"' interrupted Hugh scornfully. 'Something told you the other day that your room was full of devils. You

saw them with your own eyes swarming about your bed. Were they there? If you want to know what's the worth of these ideas about devils and hell and all that rubbish just consider the kind of people that hold them—women or womanish men, or sick people, or mad people. Would you trust their judgment on any other subject in the world? Or do you find any man in sound health and of a sound mind, whose judgment you would trust on any other subject, bother himself about such rubbish? "Something tells you!" Do you remember when we were children together old Margaret used to tell us that, if we did something she forbade us to do, the Big Black Boodie Man would come and carry us off? Did he? You were always afraid and begged me not to do it, but I did it that I might see this Big Black Man. Did he ever come? Yet you're afraid still of an old woman's bogie invented by interested priests!'

'It's no use talking that way, Hugh. There's retribution. We can see for our-

selves there's retribution,' looking again at his shrunken and shaking hands.

'If you thrust your finger in the fire you'll get burnt. There's that kind of retribution, of course, because, if there wasn't, the race would degenerate and die out. But we can't see for ourselves in Nature any retribution or compensation for its own sake, for the sake of pure justice. What heaven is there for a cab-horse, or for that wretched rabbit you hear squeaking there in the fangs of the weasel? Nature is injustice itself, for its one law is that the weak—what you would call the good and innocent—should be the prey of the strong—what you would call the crafty and cruel. That's all the retribution I see for myself.'

'But there's a man's conscience.'

'Conscience! What is conscience? A set of ideas sown in your heart so long ago that you fancy they grew there of themselves—that you were born with them. If conscience were anything else, would there be as many different consciences as there are

creeds? Conscience! It's a pretty guide when it makes a man in one country brain his father when he grows old, and in another country burn his mother when she becomes a widow!'

'But in all creeds and countries there's a belief in another life, Hugh; we can't get rid of it; it's an instinct.'

'If it's like all our other instinctive hopes it's a lie—that's all I can say—it's a lie. We are led on by lies from our cradle to our grave. "Only do this, only get that, and you'll be happy;" and we trudge on with the mirage always at the same distance before us, till we drop in the sands with our thirst unquenched. How a man, after having been fooled all his life with such lies, can bring himself to believe the last and biggest of them all, I can't imagine.'

'You believe in nothing, Hugh,' his cousin cried, with a shuddering kind of admiration.

'I believe in the only thing Nature believes in—strength.'

'Ah, but when it goes!' Edward replied with a despondent shake of the head.

'When a man's strength goes—when his mind is shaken and his nerves shattered, and he becomes a woman or a child—he may believe what women and children believe; but what's his judgment worth then? You never see a ghost by daylight—and it's only what you see by daylight you should believe in. When you get a bit stronger you'll wake from this nightmare and wonder how you ever believed in it.'

'I shall never get stronger, Hugh.'

'Tut, man; at your age you've only to let yourself alone to be as strong as ever in a month.'

'But I can't—I can't! Oh, my God! I can't!' cried the wretched man as he flung himself into the seat which had just been vacated by Lucy, buried his head in his hands and wept pitifully. Hugh stood looking down with a hard contempt upon the tears which forced themselves through his quivering fingers.

'Be a man!' he said with scorching scorn. But his cousin was too abjectly depressed to be roused even by this taunt.

'Hugh,' he cried presently, while hiding still his tears with his hands—'Hugh, shut me up from myself somewhere—anywhere.'

'You're shut up tight enough here, aren't you?' Hugh demanded sharply.

'It's no use, Hugh; I—I found that key.'

'In my pocket?' retorted Hugh with a sneer. He knew well that his cousin had stolen in at night and taken the cellar key out of his pocket. Indeed, he knew perfectly well beforehand that his pocket was about as unsafe a place for it as any that it could have been put in.

'I couldn't help it—I can't help it. You don't know what it is—you're in hell, and a drop on your burning tongue is heaven.'

'And sinks you in hell again deeper than ever!'

'You don't think of that—no more than the wrecked sailor who drinks sea-water thinks of to-morrow's madness. You don't know what it is,' he repeated vehemently, starting suddenly to his feet.

'I ought to know by this,' Hugh replied rather brutally. He found this hectoring manner most effective with his feeble cousin, who had been reduced by it to abject dependence upon him.

'You cannot be more sick of me than I am of myself. It will be best for both that I should go to one of those places.'

'What places? To an asylum?'

His cousin winced at the name which Hugh had blurted out bluntly.

'Where they take charge of such cases,' he said, looking away towards the river with an expression of wide-eyed despair in his face.

'Nonsense!' Hugh cried impatiently. 'You might as well go into a lunatic asylum at once. It would be known everywhere and be brought up against you to the last day of your life. Besides, I don't believe in asylums where it's the manager's interest to keep his patients as long as possible. Your best chance is to stay quietly where you are and let me pull you through.'

'But it's such a tie on you,' urged his

cousin weakly. He was conscious that this plea meant nothing and would go for nothing, yet he could not help urging it feebly. He felt that to be sent to some asylum for inebriates was his last chance; but if his masterful cousin disapproved of it there was nothing more to be said. Still the very feebleness which made him unable to oppose his cousin made him urge impotently what he knew it was useless to urge.

'Pooh! that's nothing, and you know it's nothing. I'd as soon be here as anywhere—sooner if you'd only cheer up a bit.'

Great comfort in this practicable suggestion. Sir Edward stared blankly at the flooded river for some time in silence, and said then desperately, 'If one could be dead without dying!'

'Now, what does that mean?' asked Hugh contemptuously. 'That you fear what you know to be nothing! You don't believe in ghosts, but you're afraid of the dark!'

'Why should every one fear it if there were nothing to fear?' Sir Edward asked,

weakly and inconsequently reverting to his former argument.

'Why should every one be led to hope for what he never attains? It's the other side of the same cheat. I tell you those instincts, or whatever you choose to call them, of hope in life and of fear of death are all lies with the same object—to keep us alive. That's all Nature wants. Man's the only creature with this horror of something after death, because he's the only creature with the sense to commit suicide. To keep him out of this *terra incognita* Nature does what the old map-makers did—fills it with feigned monsters—

'"So geographers, in Afric maps,
With savage pictures fill the gaps."'

Then Hugh, not with any Machiavelian intention, but simply out of his own interest in the topic—which was real and deep—held forth with some learning and at great length upon the subject of suicide. He quoted Seneca and Epictetus and Pliny's Titanic boast that man was higher and happier than the Deity in this, at least, that he could, when

he chose, put an end to his existence. There was nothing against suicide, he said, even in the Bible, and no hint in four-fifths of the Bible of any existence after death. Finally he wound up with Cicero's account of the belief in immortality, '*Somnia sunt, non docentis, sed optantis;*' and with this fine sonnet, of the same purport, of Eugene Lee-Hamilton's—

' "The hollow sea-shell which for years hath stood
On dusty shelves, when held against the ear
Proclaims its stormy parent; and we hear
The faint far murmur of the breaking flood.
We hear the sea—the sea? It is the blood
In our own veins, impetuous and near,
And pulses keeping pace with hope and fear,
And with our feelings' every shifting mood.
Lo! in my heart I hear, as in a shell,
The murmur of a world beyond the grave,
Distinct—distinct, though faint and far it be,
Thou fool, this echo is a cheat as well—
The hum of earthly instincts; and we crave
A world unreal as the shell-heard sea." '

Having recited this most effectively, Hugh turned to say to his cousin, 'You think yourself wretched, but that was written by a man

as he lay on his back in agony from incurable spine disease, paralysed hand and foot, and unable without torture to hear a book, or his own verses even, read out to him. Every man doesn't become a woman when his strength goes.'

Hugh, absorbed in a subject which had a kind of fascination for himself, talked out of a full mind of suicide, annihilation, etc., without much regard to the attention or indifference of his auditor, and was hardly prepared therefore for his cousin's interest in the matter. But then his cousin's interest was not of a kind with which Hugh could sympathise deeply. He fastened upon Hugh's incidental assertion that there was no hint of another world in four-fifths of the Bible, and to this point he returned more than once in the teeth of Hugh's scornful impatience of a question so unprofitable. Hugh at last disposed of the whole matter finally and *ex cathedrâ* in this dogmatic fashion :

'There's no more hint in four-fifths of the Bible of another world than there is of America,

and for the same reason—there was no suspicion of its existence. As for suicide, a man has as much right to get rid of his life as he has to get rid of a limb, if it's more bother to him than it's worth. It is a mere question of courage, or rather of cowardice, whether you fear life or death most.'

We have quoted the foregoing conversation, because it is necessary to give our readers an idea of the kind of man who held now in his strong hands the fate, not only of Sir Edward, but of Lucy. Hugh really did believe only in the only thing Nature seemed to him to believe in—strength. He held the faith of the lion and the eagle, that the weak were made to be the prey of the strong. This was, he thought, the sum and substance of the teaching of natural religion. As for any other religion, he considered that when it was not a form of erotic passion, or a form of hysterical nervousness, it was an invention of the weak and of the aged to curb and control the young and strong. It was a kind of trades' union code by which the feeble

majority kept under the energy and enterprise of the vigorous minority. Looking beneath the vast and complex superstructure of morality, etc., he discovered that, so far from being divinely based upon a rock, it was built upon sands, and shifting sands too, for it varied essentially in different ages and (in the same age) in different countries. It differed in nothing, he thought, either in the way it was built up, or in the purposes it was designed to serve, from the morality of the communities of ants or bees. All that was to be said on this side of the question, no one could see or say better than he; but to what was to be said on the other side, he was totally and wilfully blind. He would not listen to it for the same reason that Ahab would not hearken to Micaiah, 'because he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.'

It will be seen then that poor Lucy was not in good hands.



CHAPTER XV.

A CRISIS.

HUGH DROMORE had good reason for his cool assumption of Lucy's love for him—other and more positive reasons than those his coxcombry gathered from Lucy's bearing. Our pretty little Jessie was bound to his service by the double bond of love and lucre—was bound to him, that is, body and soul, for money was the heaven of her small and sordid soul. In part to magnify her office as a confidential maid, in part to please her lover and employer, and in part to cheapen her mistress, Jessie represented Lucy's infatuation with him to be much deeper than it was. It had not taken her long to discover that he thought the less of her mistress the more her mistress thought

of him; and thus it came about that Jessie's jealousy took the odd form of representing her rival's love to be more desperate than it was. It brought her mistress down to her own level—an intense gratification to the jealousy of so small a soul as Jessie's—and it degraded Lucy in the same degree in the estimate of Hugh Dromore.

Therefore Jessie invented, for the gratification of his vanity and of her own jealousy, confessions of almost frenzied lovelornness as having been made to her by Lucy; so that it is little to be wondered at if he came to think more lightly of Lucy than she deserved. A girl who could talk to her maid in the way Jessie represented Lucy as confiding in her, was hardly likely to be held in high respect even by a more chivalrous man than Hugh Dromore.

But this was not the whole, or perhaps the worst of the damage done by the maid to her mistress' character. Jessie's jealousy found a more natural and effective vent in describing and exaggerating both the number and

fervour of Lucy's former flirtations. Lucy had certainly not a staid or guileless 'record,' but she was very far indeed from being the wholly heartless and shameless coquette that Jessie made her out to be. In this way Jessie, whose mean little soul was on fire with a raging and rancorous jealousy, did all she could, not without success, to degrade Lucy in the judgment of Hugh Dromore.

Now Hugh Dromore was a man whose natural contempt for weakness generally had been intensified in the case of the sex by the facility of his conquests. He was, as we have said before, an ideal woman's hero in right of the strength and beauty of his person, his cavalier manners, and the Byronic cynicism of his conversation and of his life. An immense number of women worship men of the Centaur type—the brain of a man informing the body, strength, and passions of a brute—and Hugh Dromore was as fine a specimen of such a type as any lady novelist has conceived. Therefore his conquests, or *bonnes fortunes*, to use the fine and foul

Chesterfieldian phrase, were many and easy, and their number and facility had of course the effect of deepening his contempt for the sex. *A propos* of Lord Chesterfield, we could not give a more adequate or precise idea of Hugh's estimation of the sex than by this elegant extract from one of the letters of that *Arbiter Elegantiarum*:—

'Women are only children of a larger growth; they have an entertaining tattle, and sometimes wit; but for solid reasoning, good sense, I never in my life knew one that had it, or who reasoned or acted consequentially for four-and-twenty hours together. Some little passion or humour always breaks in upon their best resolutions. A man of sense only trifles with them, humours and flatters them, as he does with a sprightly, forward child, and no flattery is either too high or too low for them; they will greedily swallow the highest, and gratefully accept of the lowest. . . . Women are much more like each other than men; they have, in truth, but two passions—vanity and love. These are their universal characteristics. All they say and all they do tends to the gratification of their vanity or their love.'

Having such an idea of the sex generally—not without reason, as far as his own experience of it went—he was the more prepared

to form his opinion of Lucy from Jessie's venomous reports. And having formed such an opinion of Lucy, he was the last man to think of marriage with so forward, facile, and confirmed a coquette. He did not think deliberately of anything less, but simply allowed himself to drift on these summer seas with the brightest and prettiest girl he had ever met as the idle pilot of his heart. Then came one day a crisis following close upon the declaration of love we have described.

Lucy on this day was first at the tryst, and walked up and down the path by the river in impatient agitation. When at last Hugh appeared, she hurried to meet him with a nervous eagerness which assured him that something unusual and unpleasant had occurred.

'Hugh, my sister is coming.'

'Yes?' interrogatively, as not seeing anything very terrible in this announcement.

'It puts an end to our meetings.'

'Oh!'

'I shall not be able to get out of her sight for an hour together.'

He thought a little over this news, and said then with a searching look into Lucy's face, 'What put it into her head to come?'

'It's a long story. Father is angry with her, and sends her here for a punishment.'

He was satisfied. For a passing moment he had suspected this to be a ruse to force his hand.

'When does she come?'

'On Thursday.'

'And how long will she stay?'

'As long as I stay, probably,' Lucy replied in a chill and hurt tone. His cross-examination of her was cool, sharp, and business-like, showing little of a lover's alarm, or even eagerness. Perceiving her offence and its cause, he put his arm round her, lifted her off her feet as lightly as though she were a child, and held her up helplessly, while he kissed her again and again. 'Love will find out a way,' he whispered. Instinct or experience had taught him that even this physical mode of bringing home to a woman her helplessness and his strength, had an almost mesmeric effect.

It certainly reassured Lucy at once of his wish and of his power to have and to hold her against all comers; while, at the same time, it seemed to lift her troubles off her shoulders as lightly as he had lifted her off the ground.

'But what shall we do, Hugh?' looking up at once pleadingly and trustfully into his face.

'Is your sister a dragon?'

'Oh no, it's not that; but she's just goodness itself.'

'I didn't think she *could* be plain,' he replied, pointing the compliment with a kiss.

'Plain? She's anything but plain. What put it into your head that she was plain?'

'I never knew "goodness itself" anything else. It's a business like the wine trade, which those take to who fail or are unfit for anything else.'

'You wouldn't say so if you knew Mary; she's not pretty—she's beautiful, and there's no one so good—not goody, you know, but just good.'

'Stupid, do you mean?' he asked with an affectation of perplexity.

'No, I don't mean that, and you don't mean it either. You don't really think goodness *always* stupid and ugly like the beast? Mary isn't, anyway. She's very clever.'

'It will take all her cleverness to separate us now, dearest, won't it?'

Here followed a passionate love passage—a plunge into bliss from which it took them some minutes to emerge into the light of common day. At last Lucy asked again, 'But what shall we do about it, Hugh?'

'I must think it over. I can think of nothing while you are with me, but I shall have time to plan something in the long hours when you're away. Is this scrape of your sister's a love-scrape?'

'Father thinks it is; but it's a mere misunderstanding,' Lucy replied in some confusion, remembering the cause and subject of the misunderstanding.

'Of course,' he said sarcastically, misconstruing her confusion to be vicarious on Mary's behalf.

'You would know it to be "of course," if you knew Mary.'

'If I knew her as well as her own father knows her?' he asked, laughing pleasantly to take the sting from the retort.

'You're altogether wrong,' replied Lucy, shaking her head. 'She's not in the least like what you imagine her to be in any way, and least of all in that way. *She* will never get into a love-scrape.'

'"Goodness itself" is always an old maid, I know. "A virgin thorn" in her sister's side. But she'd have had a fellow-feeling for you if it was for a love-scrape she was sent into exile. By the way,' he said suddenly, holding Lucy from him to look pleasantly but sharply into her face, 'was it for a love-scrape also that you were exiled?'

Lucy blushed scarlet. She had not the least idea that he was speaking from a brief furnished to him by Jessie, but thought that the arrow which struck home was shot from a bow drawn at a venture. Therefore, she considered it safe to equivocate. 'I'm

always in father's black books. He sent me here, as he sent me to school after mother's death, to be rid of me.'

The equivocation was unfortunate. It would have been better for her if she had confessed particularly and in words what her scarlet face had transparently and generally confessed—the love-scrape which had exiled her to Burnside. As it was, both her blush and her equivocation confirmed to his mind Jessie's tales, which a frank explanation would have robbed of their sting. If he had had any doubt before, he had none now of her being an arrant flirt, who deserved no more quarter than she had been used to give. At the same time her wit, sprightliness, and loveliness attracted and even fascinated him, so that he could not now, if he would, have given up the pursuit of her.

'So your father wants to be rid of you, does he? Then it was a happy thought of his to send you here. I shall be delighted to relieve him of the grievous burden. I only wish my father was as accommodating,

and then we could see our way out of this difficulty straight enough. But if I marry any one but the old lady of Threadneedle Street I become a pauper. He will not only cut me off with a shilling, but he cuts off the present supplies, and leaves me to my wits and debts—both rather heavy. We must find some other way out of it, my darling.' But Lucy, who could see no other way out of it, was silent and saddened. Wherefore he resumed after a moment or two's pause: 'You see Mrs. Grundy's disapproval, or even the disapproval of "goodness itself," doesn't matter to us as long as we are all in all to each other. Does it, dearest? What's all the world to us when we are all the world to ourselves? But the disapproval of my father is a substantial matter. We can't afford to quarrel with our bread and butter, and, if we have to choose between the two, we mustn't drop the substance for the shadow.'

'How do you mean?' Lucy asked in a perplexity, which obviously was unfeigned. He, however, though he was unprepared

for so innocently point blank a question, was not disconcerted by it in the least.

'I mean that, whatever we give up, we cannot give up each other. Can we, darling?' again pressing her to him and kissing her.

'We can wait, Hugh,' she murmured, imagining now that he must have meant merely a long and secret engagement by his allusions to the disapproval of her sister and of Mrs. Grundy. Had she not herself suggested that Mary would be certain to disapprove of a secret engagement? What else could he infer from her dread of Mary's discovery of their meetings? He knew nothing of the Rowan entanglement, and he must, therefore, have imagined Mary so strait-laced as to be shocked by a clandestine engagement. Hence his sneers at her sister as 'goodness itself,' and as a 'virgin thorn.' Lucy, arguing in this way, could imagine his allusions to refer only to a long and secret engagement. Wherefore she said, 'We can wait, Hugh.'

'What! till my father dies, or my cousin

kills himself—till God knows when? You don't know what love is, Lucy, or at least what my love is. *I* can't wait; I never could for anything; and how can I for what is everything to me—everything, dearest?'

'But if we can't help ourselves?'

'I tell you "love will find out a way." There are more ways than through your father's church porch. You think only of parson, clerk, and prayer-book, bride's-maids, bride-cake, and breakfast; but in Scotland we can parson and clerk ourselves, and be one with a word; for the sanctity of holy matrimony, you see, is a geographical expression—it's a sacrament in Ireland, a service in England, a *tête-à-tête* in Scotland. What is right on one bank of the Tweed is wrong on the other. "*Plaisante justice qu'une rivière ou une montaigne borne! Verité au deçà des Pyrenees, erreur au delà!*"'

There are as many ways of saying such things as there are of compounding poisons with food. You may mix it so subtly that the most delicate palate will not detect it, or

you may mix it so grossly as to be at once perceived and rejected by the coarsest palate. Now Hugh Dromore had two ways of saying to a girl inoffensively what would, if said otherwise, have hurt or shocked her. He would say this equivocal thing either airily as a playful paradox, or casually as a commonplace universally acknowledged. He never put it pointedly, or argumentatively, or even seriously. The seed he sowed, or sought to sow, floated light as thistledown, and would be known to have been seed only when it sprang up as thistles.

He delivered himself, for instance, of this scoff at the sanctity of marriage in his casual manner, as though what he said was such a certainty and commonplace as to be hardly worth repeating. It took so little hold on Lucy's mind that she considered it only as an argument of his in favour of a secret Scotch marriage—to which she had not the least objection. As, however, she could not well say so, she remained silent, and her silence was interpreted by him according

to Jessie's account of her character. He imagined that she quite understood him to be making light of marriage itself, and that her silence meant mute and mild disapproval of the laxity of his notions. Therefore he glided away in his supple manner from the subject, having, indeed, said as much upon it as he thought it prudent for the present to say.

For the rest of the interview no more was said about the future beyond a promise from him to have some plan to propose to her to-morrow.

When they separated Lucy had not the least doubt that he would propose to-morrow an elopement to Scotland, and such a secret and informal marriage there as he had just described. To this, as we have said, she had not the least objection, for it seemed the most simple and not the least pleasant way out of the difficulty. She had almost made her mind up for a romantic elopement before she had ever seen Hugh Dromore, and she was little likely to shrink from it now when her life was bound up with his. The scandal

of the thing was its only drawback, and the fangs of scandal could be drawn by her taking Jessie with her as her maid.

But Hugh Dromore had no thought, not merely of a marriage in Scotland or elsewhere, but of an immediate elopement, or even of an immediate step of any kind, since he could not safely leave his cousin in his present state. His only idea was to contrive some way by which he and Lucy might baffle the vigilance of her sister and continue to meet, until, having got Sir Edward off his hands, he could elope with Lucy with a safe conscience.

But circumstances were too strong for him, as we shall see.

It might have seemed long to Lucy till to-morrow if she had not had her dresses, etc., to think of. What was she to take with her? It is hardly possible for a man to realise the importance of such a question to such a girl. Is it self-contempt or contempt for us that makes young ladies attach such extravagant importance to dress? Do they themselves think, or do they imagine that we

think, the calumny of Obid—the girl is the least part of herself—

> 'Auferimur cultu et gemmis auroque teguntur
> Omnia; pars minima est ipsa puella sui.'

Here at this great crisis of her life, when she was about to wreck others' happiness and to risk so precariously her own, Lucy has thought, and a good deal of thought too, to spare to her wardrobe. Therefore Jessie is summoned and directed to unpack and display her mistress' dresses, etc., by spreading or suspending them in all parts of the room. This the little handmaiden did with a pale set face and a quick-beating heart. She knew that Lucy had just come from a meeting with Hugh Dromore, and she at once concluded that an immediate elopement had been arranged between them in view of Miss Lisle's coming on Thursday. Wherefore her smouldering jealousy was now aflame and consuming her.

'Are you going somewhere, miss?' she brought herself to ask at last in a voice that she could not wholly steady.

'Perhaps,' Lucy replied almost absently, looking with her head on one side at the body of a dress she was holding up for inspection.

'Soon, miss?'

'Soon, if at all; and you must come with me, Jessie.'

'Me, miss!'

'There; I shall tell you when I know myself; but I shall not know myself before to-morrow.'

Jessie asked no further questions, for she was sure that she would herself know before to-morrow more about it than her mistress. She was to meet Hugh Dromore to-night to hear definitely about a situation he had offered to get for her—a wonderful situation in her eyes, for the family was very 'big,' the wages big, the establishment in the country big, and, best of all, there was a big establishment during the season in London. Jessie loved money, position, gaiety, and admiration with all her whole heart and soul and mind and strength. But she loved also

Hugh Dromore intensely, and was intensely jealous of Lucy. Therefore, she at once was and was not anxious for a place which would take her, and which was meant, she suspected, to take her well out of the way of him and her mistress. She was quite right in the suspicion. Her transparent jealousy, which at each meeting seemed to grow more and more furious, had alarmed Hugh Dromore with the fear that she would separate him and Lucy at all hazards. Either she would divulge his meetings with Lucy to her uncle, or she would divulge to Lucy his meetings with herself. Wherefore he volunteered to procure for her this irresistible situation, and explained to her that he wished her to accept it because he was on such intimate terms with the family to whom he had recommended her that he stayed at their house oftener and longer than anywhere else. This Jessie would believe while she was with him, but would doubt while away from him, and would wholly discredit when her mistress returned to tell her that she had met him.

Hence Jessie's distraction between interest and passion. Though she was a sordid little soul, and loved money as only, perhaps, a West Riding girl could, she would certainly have sacrificed interest to passion, if the sacrifice would have separated Hugh Dromore and her mistress, without at the same time estranging him utterly from herself. But she did not believe that anything she could do would separate them now, while she felt sure that anything she did with the object of estranging them would disgust him irretrievably with herself. Therefore, she had decided to accept the situation if he could procure it for her; it would at least take her out of sight and hearing of her rival's triumphs. He was to have heard this morning if he had succeeded in getting it for her, and to-night he was to meet and tell her of his success.

But he was not true to the tryst. As Jessie had led him to think that Lucy confided everything to her, he feared to face the furious jealousy of the handmaiden imme-

diately after her hearing from her mistress the particulars of that morning's meeting. Indeed, he was getting of late thoroughly tired of this exquisitely pretty, but greedy, crafty, inane little poppet, who had the soul of a scullion in a houri's body. Even if he had not dreaded her power and will to make mischief he would have been glad to get her well off his hands. Wherefore within the last week he had rather shunned her, seeing her seldom and for a short time—and to-night, as we have said, he did not keep his appointment.

Jessie, after waiting for him a little in feverish impatience, got upon the seat beneath the oak and put her hand into a hollow in its trunk, where he had taught her to look for letters from him. There was one for her, but it was written so dimly with a pencil that in the thickening dusk she could not read it. As, however, the note itself was a certain indication that he would not come to-night, she hurried home on the wings of impatience. When she had reached home she went first to the kitchen for a candle, and sped then

upstairs to her room to read her note. She had to grope some time for matches before she could find them to light the candle, and just as she had at last lit it and drawn the letter from her pocket, Martha, who was given to prowling about stealthily after her servants, appeared before her so startlingly that the note dropped from her hands. Jessie cried out as she dropped the note, and was so much taken aback that Martha had picked it up before the girl recovered herself.

'Who is this from?' asked Martha sternly.

'I—I don't know, ma'am,' stammered Jessie, hardly knowing what she said.

'*I* must know,' replied Martha grimly; and, before Jessie (whose nerves already had been so completely unstrung as to make such a shock doubly disconcerting) could interfere or even remonstrate, Martha had torn open and read this brief note—

'If you have thought over my proposal, and will agree to it, all is arranged. But you must decide at once, and start this week. Only a moment to scribble this. H. D.'

Martha, who was by no means a brilliant person, would have been at a loss to discover the meaning of this stenographic and abrupt epistle if her mind had not been of course prepossessed with the idea of a love affair. In the light of this prepossession, however, the meaning of the note was clear to her. Plainly it was a proposal of elopement. Exclaiming only, 'Wicked girl!' in a voice and with a frown of wrathful reprobation, she hurried away to show Lucy a letter which justified all and more than all she had always urged against Jessie and against Lucy's defence of her. The very muteness and meekness of the dumbfounded Jessie, who generally was even aggressively saucy to Martha, was confirmation strong of the girl's guilt.





CHAPTER XVI.

LUCY'S READING OF THE LETTER.

MARTHA, in her eagerness to triumph over Lucy, hurried away without saying another word to the stupefied Jessie. She found Lucy in her room still reviewing her dresses with the anxiety of a general reviewing on the eve of an action forces on which he must rely for victory.

'Now! What do you say to that?' cried Martha exultantly, as she handed Lucy the letter. Lucy, recognising at once the writing, flushed suddenly and as suddenly paled again as she read the note. What could it mean?

'That's your model maid!'

'Jessie?'

'Yes; Jessie.'

Then Martha explained that she had sur-

prised the girl just as she was about to open the note, and had startled her so that she dropped it. As she looked the picture of confusion and guilt, and could stammer out only that she did not know from whom it was, Martha of course opened and read it. And well it was that she did, for it contained nothing less, as Lucy could see, than a proposal of elopement!

But by this time Lucy had found out for herself that it contained nothing less than a proposal of elopement. The letter, as she read it, was plainly meant for herself, and had been entrusted for her by Hugh to Jessie, who, staunch to her trust, had not betrayed either of them to Martha. Its curt abruptness was due to the writer's haste; and the absence from it of address and of all terms of endearment was due to his fear of its falling (as it had fallen) into the wrong hands. He had scribbled the note hastily after he had planned their route, and had arranged by telegraph for her reception at their destination; and he had sent it to prepare her to give her decision

at to-morrow's meeting. Its peremptory tone was not merely characteristic of his masterfulness; it was meant to give a fillip to her wavering resolution.

All this seemed very clear and certain to Lucy, who had not the faintest suspicion of Jessie's relations to Hugh Dromore to suggest to her the true conclusion.

'What do you think of that?' asked Martha triumphantly, when Lucy, having read and reread the note, had heard the explanation of how it had been come by.

'I don't know what to think. I must see her,' Lucy replied in some confusion, which Martha attributed to the shame of defeat in the long-drawn battle between them about the merits of the handmaiden.

'You may tell her from me,' cried Martha, as Lucy was hurrying from the room in her eagerness to secure Jessie's silence—'you may tell her from me that she shall not stay another day in this house—not another day.' Martha spoke vindictively and decisively, for Jessie, whose pride had been pampered

by Hugh Dromore's attentions, and whose temper had been soured by her jealousy of Lucy, had of late been insufferably saucy to Martha. All the neatness and deftness in the world could not reconcile her to such insolence. Hence Martha's delight to catch the girl tripping in an offence too gross for even Lucy to palliate.

Lucy found Jessie still somewhat stunned, but so far recovered as to be prepared to present to her young mistress a front of sullen defiance. To her utter amazement, however, her young mistress taking and pressing both her hands cried, 'Oh, Jessie, it was *splendid* of you not to tell! Where did you meet him? You must still let her think the letter was for you, and we shall make it up to you. Where did you meet him?'

Jessie for a moment was completely bewildered.

'I—I didn't meet him, miss,' she stammered.

'Did he come to the house with it?' asked Lucy, amazed in turn.

By this time Jessie was beginning to understand that Lucy thought the note was meant for herself. She had only heard of it and not read it probably, Jessie thought.

'Didn't she give it to you, miss?'

'Of course she gave it to me, thinking it was for you. It *was* good of you, Jessie, to let her think so. But did he bring it himself?'

'Have you read it, miss?' Jessie asked, incredulously.

'To be sure I've read it. There wasn't much in it to read, luckily, and nothing to tell for whom it was meant. I thought he must have met you somewhere and pencilled it then and there for you to bring to me. I never thought of his coming to the house with it.'

'What was in it, miss?' asked Jessie eagerly.

'Oh, nothing.'

'The mistress seemed to think it something very bad,' replied Jessie, not unnaturally aggrieved at being denied the contents of her own letter. Lucy, thus reminded that Jessie

was sure to hear Martha's account of the letter, thought it best to be more explicit. After all, as the elopement was now arranged for, and as Jessie was to accompany her, the confidence must be made, and here was a good opportunity for making it. She could not bring herself to show Jessie the note, because it was so bald, curt, and peremptory, but its contents and meaning she must confide to her.

'She thought it proposed an elopement, Jessie; and so it did.'

'An elopement!' gasped Jessie, for one brief blissful moment imagining that her letter had really proposed this to her. But Lucy mistook her emotion to mean dismay at the nature of the offence she was to be charged with.

'It means that really, but it might mean anything; and we can easily invent something to suit it. We might say it meant a situation you were offered. It would do quite well for that,' said Lucy, glancing through the note. Jessie's heart sank again.

'I'd better know what's in it, miss,' she said very sullenly in the deep bitterness of her disappointment. Lucy, taking her sullenness for annoyance at the charge the letter laid her open to, felt that to reassure her she must read it.

'It reads quite like the offer of a situation. I'll give you the pith of it, and you will see yourself that it does.'

Lucy read the whole of the letter as though she was reading only the body of it.

'You see you can say it's the offer of a new place, and that's just what it means to you, Jessie.'

Then Lucy explained the letter by the proposal (as she understood it to be) which Hugh Dromore had made to her that morning of an elopement and of a Scotch marriage. Jessie listened and took it all well in; and yet, though the announcement seemed of almost life and death importance to her, her mind would wander from it to wonder with what endearments his letter to her had begun and ended! The mind of a woman in

love seems to lose all sense of proportion. The least things pertaining to her passion seem to look as large to her as the greatest. Jessie just longed to know how Hugh Dromore had addressed her, and how he had signed himself, all the time in which she was listening to news that told her he was lost to her!

Next Lucy proceeded to explain that Jessie, for propriety's sake, was to accompany her in her elopement, and was of course to continue in her service after her marriage. For this reason it mattered little whether or no she was summarily discharged, as Martha had threatened.

To all this, however, Jessie listened in unexpected and depressing silence which made Lucy, who well knew her weak point, try to cheer her by a promise of ample wages; for indeed the mistress was as generous as the handmaid was sordid. Jessie at last roused herself to appear delighted at the prospects thus spread out before herself and her mistress; but in her heart she was so desperately depressed that, in order to get rid of Lucy and to be left alone for a little, she

asked her to go down to Mrs. Lisle and to explain to her the note as an offer of a situation.

This explanation Martha received with scorn. She would not argue or listen to argument about it; for to venture against Lucy into that field was to court defeat. She simply declared again and again with dogged and childish reiteration, 'Out of this house she packs to-morrow.'

Lucy was soon silenced, since it occurred to her that Jessie's summary expulsion would suit her own plans precisely. She could smuggle out the bulk, if not the whole, of her luggage as if it were Jessie's, and be thus unimpeded in her flight.

Meanwhile Jessie came to half a dozen different and desperate resolutions in as many minutes. She would disclose Lucy's meetings with Hugh Dromore to Mrs. Lisle; she would disclose her own meetings with him to Lucy; she would write to inform Miss Lisle or Mr. Rowan of Lucy's intended elopement; she would not herself at all events go a single step with her; most certainly

she would claim the letter as her own, for she must see it, etc. etc. If any of these treacheries would have been certain to separate Hugh Dromore and Lucy, Jessie might have committed them at the sacrifice even of the solid advantages which would reward her fidelity to them. But these advantages were to her very solid and certain, while the separation of him and Lucy now seemed to her impossible. He was too resolute and Lucy too deeply enamoured for anything or any one to part them now. Wherefore Jessie had to give up one after another all her bold resolves of revenge with the result that she felt more ill-used and spiteful than she did before she had entertained them. It intensifies your thirst to have water just shown to you only to be withdrawn. Jessie, being in this venomous mood, determined that at least she would do nothing to help Hugh Dromore out of the difficulty in which the letter would involve him. Let him get out of it as he could himself. She might have written to-night to prepare him to fall in with

Lucy's mistake about the note at their meeting to-morrow; but she would not. If Lucy found out the truth for herself the mischief Jessie longed to make would be made without her being held responsible for it. With this crumb of comfort Jessie was fain to content herself.

Thus it happened that Hugh Dromore was quite unprepared for the attack Lucy made upon him at the moment of their meeting next day. For, though she had by this time got pretty well used to his brusque and masterful manner, and had even admired it as characteristic of his strength of mind and will, yet she could not but resent in common self-respect the telegraphic peremptoriness of his note. It is true that Jessie, on being re-examined thereabout, had allowed her to think that the letter had been scribbled down on the spur of the moment—the handmaid, that is, assented to each suggestion of the mistress. When Lucy, thinking that a casual encounter with Jessie must have put it into his head to write the note, asked her if he

had overtaken her near the house and pencilled the letter as he stood with her in the road, Jessie, who was thoroughly sick of the subject, assented sullenly and laconically. A letter so written would necessarily be curt, but it need not be discourteous, and its imperious summons to surrender at once and at discretion naturally revolted Lucy's pride.

Wherefore she met him next day with a sullen brow and a chilling change of manner, which he interpreted to mean that she had realised and resented yesterday's insidious suggestions.

'What have I done now?' he asked in a tone of injured innocence.

'You've no idea? Perhaps this is your usual style in writing to a lady,' producing his letter. He took it from her and read it, or pretended to read it, more than once to gain time to consider the situation. What could she mean? How had she come by this letter, and what did she make of it? He was perfectly cool and collected, after his manner, and was not going to take a single

step in the dark. Wherefore he waited under the pretence of rereading the letter till he could find out from her next speech where he stood.

'You might have been offering a situation to a servant!' Lucy pouted petulantly.

'I confess, now that you mention it, it does read a little like that,' he answered, smiling. 'But you understood it?' he added, looking inquiringly at her.

'There was no mistaking its meaning, or its style either.'

'"I think we do know the sweet Roman hand,"' he replied, smiling pleasantly without the faintest appearance of embarrassment. 'But what would you have had me say under the circumstances?'

'Do you mean that you were afraid of its falling into the wrong hands?'

'Well, you know, that was just possible.'

'It did, as it happened.' 'No!'

'Yes; my aunt came upon Jessie just as she was about to bring it to me, and seeing her look confused and conscience-stricken she read it, supposing it to be intended for Jessie!'

'Phew! She thought it was meant for Jessie!'

'And Jessie allowed her to think it, though my aunt was so angry with her that she discharged her at once. Jessie behaved just splendidly about it, and we must make it up to her, Hugh.' Lucy, having persuaded herself that he had made the excuse for the curt imperiousness of the letter which she had just put into his mouth, was only too glad to forget her offence in her fascination with him.

'But what did your aunt think it meant?' asked he, still groping his way cautiously.

'She knew it meant an elopement, but she thought the proposal was made to Jessie.'

'Oh, she knew it meant an elopement,' he said slowly, as he glanced again over the note. 'But didn't Jessie suggest some other meaning for it?'

'I suggested for her that it was the offer of a situation; but the other meaning was too plain to be mistaken even by my aunt.'

'I didn't think so when I wrote it,' he said drily.

'You made it as little like a love-letter as

possible, to do you justice; it reads more like a lawyer's letter.'

'Still its meaning was "too plain to be mistaken even by your aunt,"' he retorted, smiling.

'She got it into her head that it had to do with love, and so, of course, she found love in it; though I'm sure I don't know where,' Lucy pouted, not petulantly now, but coquettishly.

'Because *you* hadn't love in your thoughts,' he replied, kissing her pouting lips.

But, while speaking in this light bantering way, he was thinking of what the note meant now to her and to him. Plainly she was offended, not by its tenor, but by its tone; yet its tenor seemed to be his proposal of yesterday put curtly and definitely. That she understood this proposal as he had meant it he had no doubt, for he interpreted her character by Jessie's calumnies; yet she was so far from being offended by it that she plainly intended to accept it.

The promptness of her surrender detracted much from its sweetness, for it is the length and difficulty of the run that give its value to

the fox's brush. But no facility could make cheap such singular loveliness and cleverness, and he felt all the transport of his greatest love triumph as he pressed her to him caressingly.

'My own darling!' he whispered, 'you have made your mind up, haven't you?' Then, taking her blushing silence for assent, he added, 'My very own, soon!'

Presently, without raising her head from his breast, she asked in a low voice, 'What have you arranged, Hugh?'

What had he arranged? The letter said he had arranged everything, and they must start at once. It was not quite safe to leave his cousin at present, but it could not now be helped. Would he now have helped it if he could? This dragon of a sister might put her completely out of his reach, and the mere idea of her being put beyond his reach was unendurable to him at this moment when she looked her very loveliest. Even if he could, then, have explained away somehow what the note seemed to say—that he had arranged for an immediate elopement—he would not

have so flung aside a chance that might never recur. Wherefore he said, 'We must start to-morrow morning, dearest. There's a fast train for town at 11.15.'

'For London? But wouldn't that be a great round?'

'A great round?'

'We should have to come nearly all the way back to get to Scotland, shouldn't we?'

'Oh, Scotland. Did you think of Scotland?'

'I—I thought—— You said it would be simpler there,' stammered Lucy.

Then he saw at once that she referred to the contrast he drew yesterday between the secular simplicity of a Scotch and the sacred formality of an English or Irish wedding; and that she either misunderstood, or affected to misunderstand, the real drift of his remarks. Which? After a hardly appreciable pause, he answered tentatively, '"The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of——" Scotland even, if *you* are there, my darling.'

'I thought you suggested Scotland,' Lucy said, in much confusion, through the fear that

he might suppose she preferred a Scotch marriage as the more immediate.

'I should say London, if you have no choice in the matter. It's the most private place in the world.'

Lucy tried to recall how long a notice or residence a marriage by licence required in her father's church, but was too much confused to remember.

'I know no one in London,' she said, meaning that there was no one there in whose house she could stay the necessary number of days before the wedding.

'Even if you did, it wouldn't matter. If you keep out of half a dozen streets you're as safe from your friends in London as in Hong-Kong.'

'I meant there was no one there with whom I could stay. But you might find us rooms,' she said timidly.

'Of course; there will be no difficulty about that,' he replied in an offhand way, though he was in reality perplexed to make out her meaning. Who was 'us'?

'Jessie is staying at the "Abbey Arms," but she is to come back to-night for the rest of her luggage, and I can tell her then when and where to meet us. She seemed quite pleased to come and to stay with me afterwards.'

He was completely disconcerted for a moment—a most unusual occurrence with him—and remained silent, wondering whether this were guile or guilelessness. It could not surely be guilelessness? He had spoken plainly enough yesterday, and the girl was very far from being a fool, and was very far indeed—*teste* Jessie—from being an *ingénue*. If it were guile, it would be pleasant as well as easy to countermine her plot. As he was at once apt and glad to think the worst, he had very soon persuaded himself that Lucy was laying a trap for him. But such a flimsy trap! It's bottom, the treacherous Jessie!

As these thoughts held him silent for a moment, Lucy, nervously fearing he disapproved of her engaging Jessie to be her maid after her marriage without having first advised with him about it, added:

'She acted so well about that letter, and lost her place through her loyalty to us. I had to make it up to her as I could.'

Of course this reason for engaging Jessie to accompany her sounded feeble to absurdity to him with his idea of her real motive for the arrangement.

'I hadn't thought of Jessie,' he said drily, with a sudden and searching look into Lucy's face. But she replied simply and anxiously:

'Had you arranged with any one else?'

'Oh, Jessie will do very well; better than any one else?' he replied carelessly, yet with another meaning in the words than that intended for Lucy's ear.

Then it was definitely arranged that Lucy and Jessie should take the 11.15 train to-morrow morning for London. He, to avert suspicion, was to join them at Allingham junction half an hour later.

END OF VOL. II.

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